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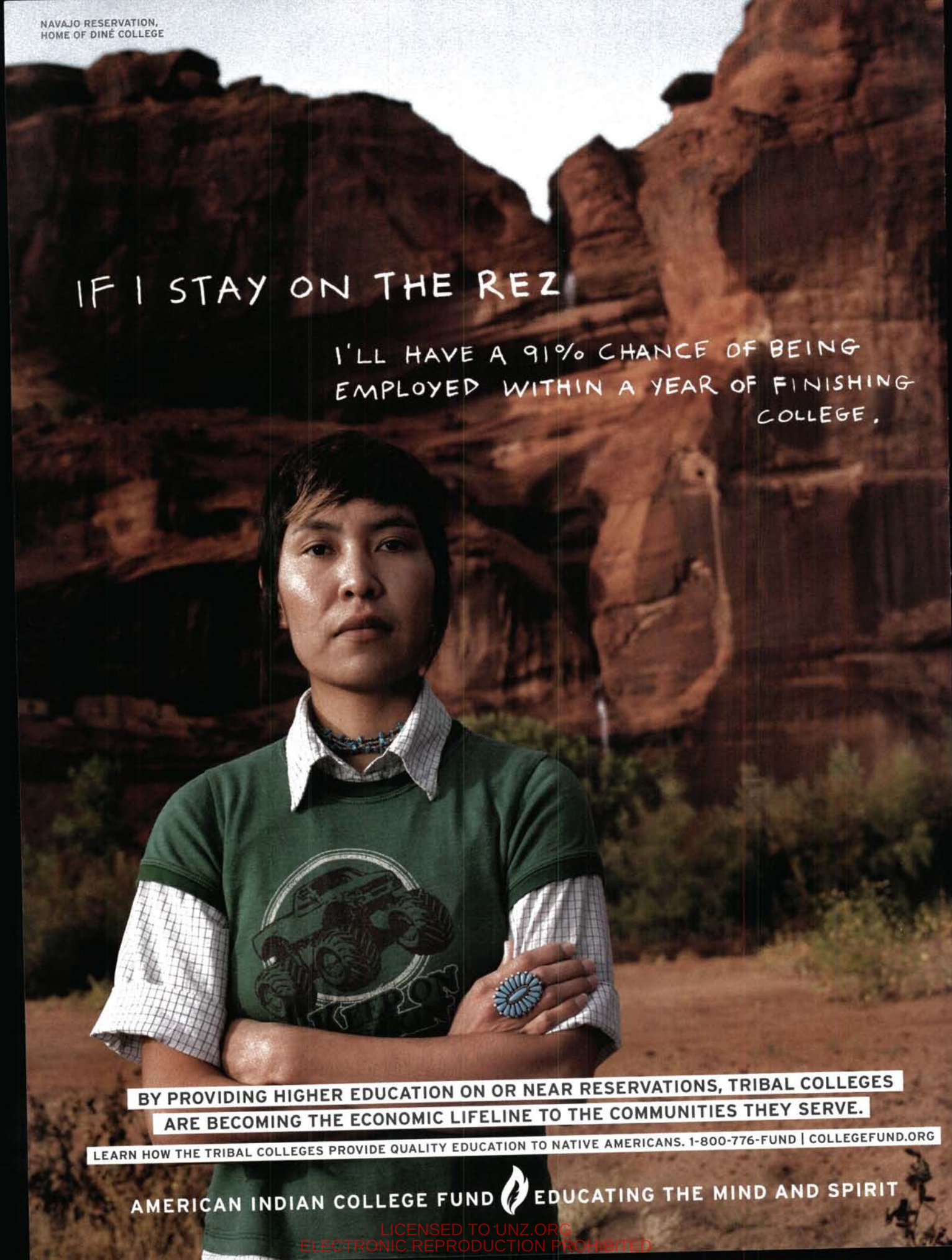
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NEW REPUBLIC
Updated daily. On the Web at www.tnr.com.

THE NEW REPUBLIC
A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND THE ARTS

APRIL 17, 2006 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,761 VOLUME 234

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CORRESPONDENCE

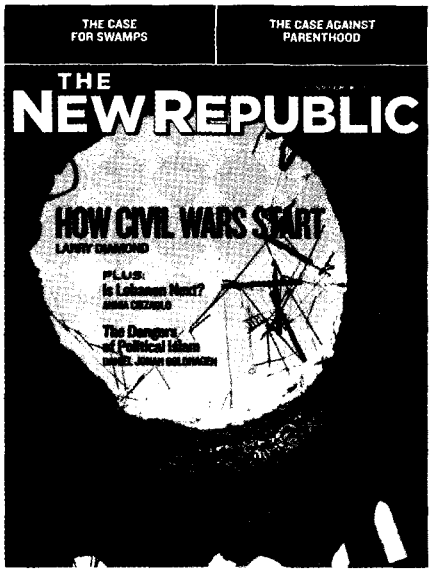
THREAT BARE

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN'S article on "political Islam" reflects THE NEW REPUBLIC's recent case of split-personality disorder: It is tolerant and left-leaning most of the time, but it is a rock-solid war hawk about Israel and anything that threatens it ("The New Threat," March 13). For an expert on genocide, Goldhagen seems to have missed the historical lesson that the only way to successfully take land away from a people is by killing most of them and reducing their offspring to irrelevance. For all his temporizing, this is, in fact, the situation in the Middle East: There will be no peace with the continued existence either of Israel or of political Islam. Which should we choose, asks Goldhagen—Hitler or Churchill?

The problem with his historical analysis is contained in his own article. Political Islam is not Hitlerian in capability, only in rhetoric. If Israelis feel threatened (and rightly so), we should encourage them to act (preemptively if necessary) to secure themselves. If anyone attacks them, we should defend our allies with enough force to thoroughly crush the threat. But the hysterical tone of this article is foolish. We are not Israel. Our existence is not threatened, except by ourselves. We have endured bloody terrorism and, despite our leaders' unbelievably inept response, we are barely affected. We are simply too big to be as afraid as Goldhagen wants us to be.

PETER R. TISCHER
Port Jefferson, New York

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN RESPONDS: It is fashionable to obscure the complexities of international politics by pretending that all problems emanate from or lead to Israel. My article actually identified the *general* phenomenon of political Islam and its *general* hostility to modernity and the West. Still, since Peter R. Tischer reduces it all to Israel, we should note the false equivalence: While political Islam's leadership, including Hamas and Iran, trumpets its desire to destroy Israel, Israelis and their leaders want to live in peace, including next to a Palestinian state. Iran, moreover, is driving to build nuclear weapons (pretty Hitlerian in capability), threatening not just Israel, but also, in a variety of ways, the world beyond, including the United States.



WAR SHAME

PETER BEINART WRITES THAT SUPporting the return of ROTC chapters to campus despite their discrimination against gays is a "winning political issue," and is also "morally important" ("War College," March 20 & 27). But what his argument smacks of most is expediency. Pressing campuses to violate their own nondiscrimination clauses is not, as Beinart suggests, a political "no-brainer." According to a *Boston Globe* poll last year, nearly four out of five Americans oppose the military's exclusion of openly gay troops, including majorities of Republicans and churchgoers. Why, they might ask, should the military get a pass on anti-gay discrimination when no evidence has shown it to be necessary to military effectiveness?

Beinart would have gays "reform [the military] from within." But this call rings hollow, both because "don't ask, don't tell" forbids gays from identifying as gay (the key to building tolerance is familiarity) and because only Congress or the judiciary, not the Pentagon, can repeal the current ban. For those who support equal treatment for gays and lesbians, the moral position is not to cave to the Democrats' need to look more pro-military. It's to defend the liberal tradition of equality and to lay the blame for the military's alienation from elite campuses on the political leaders who have the power to let gays join ROTC and earn ROTC a place on campus. The moral and political imperative here is to move the military into the twenty-first century, where the vast majority of Americans will welcome it with open arms.

NATHANIEL FRANK
Senior Research Fellow
Center for the Study of
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Brooklyn, New York

LEADERSHIP VOID

JUSTIN DRIVER ATTACKS ME IN HIS review of my book, *A Matter of Law: A Memoir of Struggle in the Cause of Equal Rights*, saying that I believed *Brown* v. *Board of Education* was "fundamentally a black endeavor" ("The Lawyers' Revolution," March 13). It was. Certainly white scholars and lawyers helped in the development of *Brown*, but the whole legal attack on segregation sprang from the mind of Charles Houston and was developed by Thurgood Marshall and me. My concern with the appointment of Jack Greenberg to head the NAACP Legal Defense Fund was that his presence there would begin to create the myth that *Brown* was the product of the white imagination.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 234, Number 14, Issue 4,761, April 17, 2006. (Printed in the United States on April 6, 2006.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated March 20 & 27, June 5 & 12, July 10 & 17, August 14 & 21, September 11 & 18, and November 27 & December 4, 2006) at 1331 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Grant Loomis at (202) 508-4444 or our NY sales office at (212) 465-8447. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97; foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, $99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $8.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling). © 2006 by The New Republic, LLC. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9383. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: letters@tnr.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call (800) 827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.

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Is it sound policy to jail expectant mothers for substance abuse and take away their babies?

"Many professional health care and child welfare organizations have banded together against criminalization on the basis that it is antithetical to the best interests of both the mother and the child."

"... criminalization has no proven effect on improving infant health or deterring substance abuse by pregnant women."

"In fact, criminalization may deter the pregnant woman from seeking out necessary prenatal care for fear of losing their children or being arrested."

"A drug-exposed infant should be removed from the custody of his/her parent(s) only if the parent(s) are unable to protect and care for the infant and either support services are not sufficient to manage this risk, or the parent(s) have refused such services."*

If removal is good policy, shouldn't we also place infants in foster care if the mother smokes, imbibes or is obese? We could build orphanages as well as prisons!

Common Sense for Drug Policy
www.CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org www.DrugWarFacts.org
www.ManagingChronicPain.org www.MedicalMJ.org
www.TreatingDrugAddiction.org
info@csdp.org

Substance Use During Pregnancy: Time for Policy to Catch Up with Research, by Barry M. Lester, PhD, Lynne Andreozzi, and Lindsey Appiah, published April 20, 2004. www.harmreductionjournal.com/content/1/1/5

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Taylor Unmade

TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

GOOD THINGS HAPPEN, EVEN these days. And one particularly good thing happened on Wednesday morning, March 28, in the Nigerian border town of Gamboru. There, an immigration official spotted Charles Taylor, in an ash-colored Land Rover, trying to cross into Cameroon. Nigerian officials seized him and flew him to Monrovia, Liberia. At 4:30 that afternoon, in the pouring rain, he disembarked in his native country, where perhaps a quarter of a million people are dead because of his efforts. After being handcuffed and read his rights, he was hustled onto a U.N. helicopter to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where he was taken to the detention center of the U.N. Special Court. There, Justice Richard Lussick told him he had been indicted on eleven counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The message, commented the court's prosecutor, Desmond de Silva, is "that, no matter how rich, powerful, or feared people may be, the law is above them."

That is not a message heard very often in Africa. During colonialism, whites were above the law and blacks were beneath it. Since independence, rapacious leaders have pillaged countries from one end of the continent to the other—and either died of natural causes or a coup-plotter's gun, or gone into cushy exile while their countrymen picked up the pieces. Taylor is now the exhilarating exception: The man who tried to build an empire stretching from Liberia into Sierra Leone and Guinea—and who used child soldiers, mass rape, and mass amputations as his weapons of conquest—will now probably spend the rest of his days in court or in prison.

When he reaches The Hague, where he will likely be sent for trial, he will join a noxious Congolese ex-militia leader named Thomas Lubanga. And, in the years to come, more African war criminals may join them, since the International Criminal Court is also investigating the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire and a rebel group in northern Uganda (and is seeking to investigate the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan).

These prosecutions represent a shift in Africa's relationship to the world. When a country like Liberia experiences mass slaughter, one overriding question often determines the world's response. That question is not, "Is the slaughter terrible?" (In the age of CNN, almost everyone can agree on that.) It is, "Is the slaughter aberrant?" If you believe people in a given society have been killing one another since time immemorial, then moral judgment is useless; wait a week, and the victims will be massacring the victimizers. The slaughter, in this view, is not political but cultural, if not downright biological.

If, on the other hand, you can look at the carnage and imagine an alternative—if you can imagine that society as peaceful, healthy, normal—then you begin looking for the culprits who have inverted the moral order. That's why people who favored intervention in the Balkans kept saying, "I can't believe this is happening in Europe"—because, in Europe, people are capable of civilized behavior.

Which brings us to Africa. Americans are saddened by African slaughter. But most are not analytically equipped to see African slaughter as aberrant. They lack an image of peaceful, healthy, normal, African civilization. And, if savagery is the norm, then everyone is a war criminal or no one is. Americans never say, "I can't believe this is happening in Africa."

This apolitical—and ultimately amoral—prism has deep roots. During the colonial period, most Europeans assumed Africa had no indigenous history, or politics, worth the name. Indeed, African history and government did not exist as academic disciplines. Instead, the West saw Africa through the prism of anthropology. In Great Britain, in particular, anthropology undergirded the policy of "indirect rule." The British needed to rule large numbers of subjects with only a handful of colonial administrators. And so they set out not to transform the tribal societies within their domain, but to preserve them. But, to do that, those societies had to be understood. So, not surprisingly, preservation-minded colonial anthropologists tended to describe African societies as static. And this, in turn, produced a Western tendency to view African conflict as primal and endemic, rather than the product of political choices made by particular people at a particular moment in time. Even when Americans did single out an African leader as unusually awful—for instance, Idi Amin—they saw him less as a deviation from his society's norms than as a gruesome caricature of them. (Thus the American news media's fascination with Amin's alleged cannibalism.)

This intellectual legacy was on tragic display during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. As Samantha Power notes in *A Problem From Hell*, "During the conflict in Bosnia, U.S. officials had tried to convince journalists that the conflict was born of 'ancient tribal hatred' "—to justify their inaction. "[I]n Rwanda reporters in the field adopted this frame on their own." This, even though the genocide was the carefully planned campaign of one political movement, and even though, prior to the twentieth century, Hutu and Tutsi were not even designations of tribe, but of social class.

But, if this ignorance contributed to the world's disgraceful inaction, Rwanda may have also turned the tide. Perhaps because it occurred at roughly the same time as Bosnia, or perhaps because a Democratic president didn't want to look racist—for whatever reason, when the international community created a war-crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, it created one for Rwanda, too. Bill Clinton even apologized to the Rwandan people. And, when commentators discuss Rwanda today, the "ancient tribal hatreds" prism has given way to the prism of genocide.

Of course, that's far easier in retrospect, when you don't have to put your troops where your mouth is. In Darfur, although the public debate has been better, the world has still stood by. In fact, the ugly reality may be that individual culpability and post-hoc prosecution have become the balm the world applies to its conscience for not stopping African slaughter in the first place.

But, while better understanding does not create the will to act, without it there is no hope at all. Reporting on Charles Taylor's arrest, none of the top U.S. newspapers mentioned his tribe. Instead, they described him as the new face of African evil. And they told of progress in Liberia and Sierra Leone, societies that, for the time being, at least, are growing more peaceful, democratic, *normal*. A good thing, indeed.

PETER BEINART

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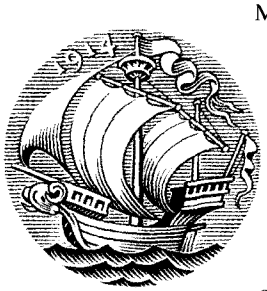
That's Hospitality

IT'S RARE THESE days for President Bush to be considered a voice of reason, but that is precisely the role he has been granted in the ongoing immigration debate. While many in the Republican Party favor draconian legislation passed by the House last December that would make it a felony rather than a civil offense to live in this country without permission, Bush has proposed letting those already here illegally stay. He would do that by creating a "guest-worker" program through which U.S. businesses could hire immigrants—either those already here or those who have yet to come—for up to six years, after which they would have to return to their home countries. Bush has described his own plan as "humane" and "compassionate." Others have hailed it as "sensible" and "practical." No one, however, has called it what it is: un-American.

The problem with Bush's plan lies in the term—and the concept of—"guest workers," because there is little that is more antithetical to the American ideal than a guest worker. While there are dangers in romanticizing this country's immigrant heritage, it is an unmistakable part of the national ethos. For generations, immigrants have come to the United States in search of a better life. In the process, they often remake themselves—as Americans. Even those who are here illegally, and whom we call illegal immigrants, can transcend that identity—or at least see their children who are born here transcend it.

But a guest worker and his family have no such opportunity for transcendence. They are slotted into a caste, with no real hope of ever rising above it. Indeed, Bush's guest-worker program would codify a large group of people in the United States as second-class citizens. Although they would enjoy many of the same legal protections as American-born workers, they would never be viewed by Americans as equals. Instead, they would be seen as transient figures here only to make a buck. They would not be immigrants or future Americans. They would merely be janitors, construction workers, and housekeepers.

Indeed, to see the pernicious (and un-American) nature of a guest-worker program, one need only look across the Atlantic at the misery such programs have wrought in Europe. Spurred by extreme labor shortages in the 1950s, a host of European countries—including West Germany, France, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands—adopted guest-worker programs. Those nations sought temporary immigrants to address their manpower problems, because they believed the labor shortages themselves were temporary and would end once the generation born after World War II entered the workforce. They also hoped that foreign workers would fill low-status jobs while allowing citizens to enjoy better-paying positions.



But the guest-worker programs also reflected European notions of nationhood—attitudes that could not be more different than those of the United States. The guest-worker programs were a way in which these European countries could avoid becoming ethnically plural societies. Of course, those nations *became* ethnically heterogeneous when the guest workers did not go home. But the workers, while remaining *in* those European countries, never became *of* them. Consider Germany, for instance, where more than two million Muslims of Turkish origin—whose families came as guest workers four decades ago—live today. They live in Germany not as Germans, but in a strange sort of nationless limbo—afforded certain benefits of citizenship (such as health care) but denied the privilege of actually being citizens. Which, of course, denies them any incentive to assimilate to their new country. The prospect of such a thing happening in the United States with Mexican guest workers is only too real.

So what is to be done? The most sensible piece of immigration legislation currently being considered is the one that passed the Senate Judiciary Committee last week—a proposal that Bush seems to be warming to, at least rhetorically. Sponsored by Edward Kennedy and John McCain, it, too, includes a provision for a "temporary worker" program. But Kennedy and McCain's program differs from Bush's in one crucial respect: It outlines a clear path to citizenship. Under Kennedy and McCain's proposal, participants in the temporary worker program would be allowed to apply for a green card after six years and would be eligible to apply for citizenship five years after that. In other words, although they would be called temporary workers, they would be anything but. They would be potential future citizens, which, of course, is a prospect that has long distinguished the United States from other nations. After all, there is nothing more American than a willingness to expand the notion of who can be one. ■

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Naomi Wolf's sacred feminine.

Sister Souljah

BY EVE FAIRBANKS

IT WAS TO be Torcuil Crichton's journalistic transfiguration. Around noon on January 17, Crichton, a lowly reporter for Glasgow's *Sunday Herald*, a small Scottish newsweekly, entered the Covent Garden Hotel in London. The hotel's quintessentially English touches make it a favorite among visiting celebrities, and Crichton had gone there to interview the American feminist author Naomi Wolf, on tour for her new book, *The Treehouse: Eccentric Wisdom from My Father on How to Live, Love, and See*. Wolf had started the day with a radio interview that included a bruising encounter with feminist icon Germaine Greer, and Crichton was, by his reckoning, about the fifteenth of Wolf's 15 British book-tour interviews. So, sitting down with her in the hotel's faux-Edwardian library, Crichton anticipated a weary, canned session; predictably, they chatted about Scotland, her past work, and her book. Hoping to draw her out on her recent divorce, he spouted about his own breakups, a tactic that only yielded clichéd sympathy. As his time drew to a close, Crichton remembered Wolf's radio appearance, and he asked if any of Greer's insults had wounded her. Staring off into the distance, Wolf replied that critics' barbs no longer mattered, because now she answered to a higher authority.

"Are we talking about God?" Crichton asked.

"Yeah, God," Wolf said. She elaborated: "I actually had this vision of—of Jesus." And that, needless to say, is when the interview really began.

Wolf's story went like this: Several years ago, while in therapy for writer's block, Wolf was asked to try a classic deep relaxation technique, where she imagined walking down a flight of stairs. When she reached the bottom and opened the door, there he was: Jesus, with a holy light radiating out of him, the light of absolute perfection and powerful love. In the vision, Wolf wasn't her usual zaftig, constantly commented-upon physical self, but rather a 13-year-old boy. The vision taught Wolf several lessons: that God cares about each and every one of us; that we are born with knowledge of our own soul, which, like Plato once taught, we forget and have to re-remember in order to realize our life's mission (in her case, to spread the gospel of feminism). That we can all, if we try, be like Jesus—radiant, loving, perfect. The revelation made tears run down her face, she confessed to Crichton.

Crichton left the Covent Garden believing he had the scoop of his career. A famously ultra-liberal Jewish feminist turning to Jesus—and that delicious 13-year-old-boy part! "This latest confessional ... will be the icing on the cake, plunging her into fresh controversy over her beliefs and her integrity as a feminist," he wrote, breathlessly, in the *Sunday Herald*. Though Wolf apparently remains a Jew, at least by her own reckoning, Crichton predicted that her admission might even "trigger a theological battle between the American Christian right and the Jewish lobby over the ownership of her soul."

But, disappointingly, although it was picked up in some British and Australian papers, Crichton's bombshell didn't make much of a splash in the States. The whole episode, he explains on the phone, remains a sort of unsolved mystery: Why did Wolf select him to deliver the news of her revelation? And why didn't Americans care? Most inscrutable is the vision itself. In her 1991 breakout book, *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf was a traditional, rigorously academic, angry feminist polemicist. Now she is a bar mitzvah–age boy visiting with Jesus. What the hell happened?

When I contacted Wolf to find out, she seemed a little uncomfortable, in the manner of one trying desperately to stave off a p.r. disaster: She sweetly declined to chat, because she was "swamped with deadlines"; then, under increasing pressure, she fired off a two-sentence statement on the strictly ecumenical nature of her vision. Then, like Jesus himself, she left me with only her works. But, as I looked back at her books, a hint emerged, a little mustard seed of an answer. And, far from representing the slow onset of total lunacy, this seed is a parable of feminism.

NAOMI WOLF, AS she tells it in *The Treehouse*, grew up in hippie San Francisco with a powerful belief in the magic of things like God,

DAVID COWLES

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poetry, romance, and beauty. As a student at Yale, she began to develop as a poet (enough, she alleges, to elicit some now-famous heavy breathing from Harold Bloom). But, while at Oxford on a Rhodes, she writes, she became "radicalized," or persuaded to scorn touchy-feely, literary fluff for the harsh realities of the world: injustice, exploitation, the oppression of women. Poetry was just the kind of girly, inward-looking, powerless activity that men wanted women to pursue, and she decided then and there that she wanted to use words in a more polemical way to effect real change.

Shortly after leaving Oxford, Wolf wrote *The Beauty Myth*. That debut book—which raged against the male power structure that enslaved women to an unattainable beauty standard—became a runaway best-seller. When it was published, critics and enthusiasts alike read it as a statistics-based screed, pumped full of dense feminist theory. And, for the most part, it is. But there are also hints of an interest in the theological. She diagnoses modern women, for example, as suffering from a case of unquenched "spiritual hunger." This hunger manifests itself through an obsession with appearance (particularly skin care) that is exploited by the beauty-industrial complex—or, as Wolf calls it, the "Church of Beauty"—whose strict commands "crudely imitate medieval Catholicism." *The Beauty Myth* wants to destroy this false doctrine, because it harms women's sense of "self," a word that appears on nearly half the pages in the book. "[W]e can imagine, to save ourselves, a life in the body that is not value-laden," Wolf writes. But she is a little fuzzy on how to feed one's spiritual hunger once the Lancôme gods are dead.

Wading through Wolf's prolific writings after *The Beauty Myth*, it becomes clear that she envisioned her particular mission as fighting not for women's rights, but for a more vaporous notion of their selves. Mostly, this took common forms, such as praising the virtues of self-esteem, but she continued to flirt with the spiritual. (A friend of Wolf's who shared an office with her in the early '90s reports that she professed to see his aura.) In *Promiscuities*, she once again identifies a spiritual void in women's lives; this time, she attributes it to society's terror of the female libido. "[T]here is a terrible spiritual and emotional hunger among many women, including myself, for social behavior and ritual that respect and even worship female sexuality," she writes.

But soon, Wolf started experimenting with a slightly more religious paradigm: Instead of saving selves, she would save souls. In a controversial 1995 NEW REPUBLIC article, she opined that, by failing to understand that abortion was a tragic act, liberal women were "in danger of losing something more important than votes; we stand in jeopardy of losing what can only be called our souls." She counseled women who have had an abortion to undertake "acts of redemption"—or what the "Jewish mystical tradition calls *tikkun*." These acts could be inspired by a variety of spiritual traditions: making "offerings to the fetus to help it rest in peace," as is the Shinto practice; or perhaps erecting "statues of the spirit guardian of children to honor aborted fetuses," as the Buddhists once did.

Over the years, Wolf's brand of feminism has become increasingly hard to pin down. She's reversed her opinions to coincide with the feminist fads of the moment, from "victim feminism," to "power feminism," to a sort of New Age feminism: By 2000, she was helping to run an institute that hosts retreats on compassionate leadership and advising Al Gore, for $15,000 a month, to wear "earth tones" to better exude his steaming inner manliness. But, throughout this peripatetic journey, Wolf maintained—and nourished—her mystical bent, her interest in liberating not only women's bodies, minds, and paychecks, but also that final frontier for feminist transformation: their souls.

By the time Wolf sat down to write *The Treehouse*, she had experienced fame, wealth, and social and political influence. And yet, she writes, during all those wildly successful years, something had been terribly wrong. *The Treehouse* is ostensibly a book about Wolf's father, a lovable, nutty poetry teacher who owns 20 old typewriters and instruments once used to scrape out a caliph's earwax. But, more fundamentally, it's about a cryptically described midlife crisis, whose ghostly, nameless presence hangs heavily over the book. "[My father] was eighty; and I was now forty; and for many reasons, I knew I had taken a wrong turn," she writes. This unspecified crisis, she goes on to explain, made her realize that, during all those years spent effecting change as an activist, she'd been neglecting her spirit. Or, as Jesus once put it, "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

But is it really so surprising that Naomi Wolf arrived at this question? Or that feminism has? As Germaine Greer informed me, in a surly e-mail message responding to repeated inquiries, "Feminism has always treated the personal as political and vice versa." In the '60s, to build momentum for their movement, feminists worked to persuade their constituents that their unhappiness had a political cause, and thus a political redemption. But, since happiness isn't ultimately a political problem, it backfired and splintered the movement during the '90s, when it seemed the achievement of many of feminism's political goals simply hadn't made women as fulfilled as they expected. But Naomi Wolf really believed the goal of feminism could be inner happiness and satisfaction. And so she barreled on, right through to the end of the story, from selves to souls to her own soul to, well, Jesus.

Wolf's vision is a little out there, but it has confirmed her mission in life, which, as she told Crichton, is to help women "remember what's sacred about them or what's sacred about femininity." That may have been an epiphany for Wolf, but it wasn't such a hot news scoop for Crichton. The American public didn't much notice. After all, what's less mysterious here than finding religion? ■

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Benedict the ecumenical. Judas Priest

BY MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

When the College of Cardinals elected Joseph Ratzinger Pope a year ago, right-wing clerics and commentators hailed the incoming pontiff as one of their own. Neocon writer George Weigel rushed an obsequious, fawning biography into print, modestly titled *God's Choice*. Father Joseph Fessio SJ, the top editor at Ignatius Press, promoted his friendship with—and ideological proximity to—Ratzinger on any cable show that would have him. Father Richard John Neuhaus's online diary read, "How sweet it is." But the joke has been on them. On the issue these American Catholic conservatives seem to care about most—the fight against societal acceptance of homosexuality—Pope Benedict XVI has been far less strident than Ratzinger the cardinal, and that has sent the right-wingers into unexpected fits of apoplexy.

Benedict has hardly retreated from the culture wars. To the contrary, he teaches that the "Truth" (with a capital T) is accessible to the Christian and found within the bosom of Catholicism. There is no love of ambiguity in Ratzinger's heart, nor will there be in his teachings as Pope. In the 1990s, he was shocked by some of the theological ruminations he heard from bishops, especially those from Asia, which he thought obscured the distinctiveness of Catholicism's claims. And Benedict believes the secularization of European thought and culture has severed that civilization from its own roots. Benedict's worldview remains steeped in his academic Augustinianism; his view is dark and, consequently, often paternalistic, defensive, and stark.

And yet, unlike many conservative Catholics in the United States, Benedict does not see combating the acceptance of homosexuality in society as the most important piece of his agenda. The reason has much to do with his new role. As doctrinal warden, Ratzinger enforced orthodoxy. But now, as a pastor, that is only one piece of his job. And Ratzinger has made it clear that, however much he insists on Christian Truth, the teachings of the Church should be applied with gentleness and an understanding of a person's lived experience.

Benedict's approach can be seen in last autumn's Vatican document banning most gays from seminary and ordination. The text came from one of the Vatican's dicastries, or departments, and it was rendered as a "prudential judgment," not as a doctrinal claim. Indeed, there was almost no theology in the document. Nonetheless, it echoed many of the right wing's fears about the effects of homosexuality on culture and suggested there was a link between homosexuality and the recent clerical pedophilia crisis, a line that Weigel and Neuhaus have pushed for years. But Benedict did not issue the document in his own name, nor even approve it "*in forma specifica*." He merely ordered its publication. Thus, the text carries more weight than, say, the guidebook to the Vatican museums, but many bishops have felt free to interpret the text in a way that guts it of its clear intent. And Benedict has said not a word about these more liberal interpretations.

Benedict's unwillingness to crack down on homosexuality has caused consternation across the right. "Among those who greatly admired Cardinal Ratzinger and were elated by his election as pope," Neuhaus recently wrote in *First Things*, "there is a palpable uneasiness." In his distress, Neuhaus harkens back to 1968—a year that neocons always seem to harken back to—when Pope Paul VI issued his famous birth control–banning encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. Then, too, the Pope decided that there would be no punitive action taken against theologians who dissented. In the neocon worldview, this tolerance of dissent led to a sea of moral chaos in the ensuing years, as if, with just a little more preaching, Catholic couples everywhere would have foresworn recourse to the pill.

The sense of betrayal many American conservatives feel toward Benedict can be seen again in their reaction to his appointment of then–Archbishop William Levada to take Ratzinger's old job as head of the Vatican's doctrinal office. Neuhaus says the appointment "occasioned widespread puzzlement. ... Levada, for all his considerable gifts, did not distinguish himself in his teaching, and his seeing to it that others taught, the Church's moral doctrine during his ten years as archbishop of San Francisco, a city commonly called the gay capital of the world." Does Neuhaus really think anyone in San Francisco or elsewhere fails to know the Church's views on homosexuality? How would endless repetition have advanced the Gospel? More important, when Levada arrived in San Francisco in 1995, the city was in the middle of the AIDS epidemic. Was the most pressing pastoral need of that city's gay community to be hit over the head repeatedly with condemnations? The suggestion is obscene.

When San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown enacted a law in late 1996 requiring all organizations that contract with the city, including the Catholic Church, to provide health benefits to the same-sex partners of their employees, Levada balked. The Church was not going to be forced into blessing same-sex relationships by the conferral of such benefits. The conservatives saw a battle coming. But Levada avoided such a conflagration by negotiating a change in the law so that an employee could designate any person legally domiciled in his household—an aunt, a same-sex partner, whomever—to receive the health care benefit. As Levada pointed out, the Church is in favor of universal health care, and this extended health benefits to thousands of citizens. It was casuistry in the best sense of the word, stretching the

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law to accommodate a real-life conundrum.

If promoting Levada to Ratzinger's old job caused puzzlement, the right wing went ballistic when Benedict chose Utah bishop George Niederauer to replace Levada in San Francisco. Niederauer was, according to Neuhaus, "gay-friendly," and he had opposed a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. Like many other bishops, he took the mildest possible interpretation of the document about gays in seminaries, and he specifically contradicted the neocon line that homosexuality bears responsibility for the clergy's sex-abuse crisis, calling that position "seriously mistaken." When Niederauer gave his first major interview after arriving in the City by the Bay, I confess I worried for Neuhaus's health. Niederauer told the *San Francisco Chronicle* he had seen *Brokeback Mountain* and found it "very powerful." Smelling salts for Father Neuhaus.

It is a new day at the Vatican. A curial official told me that Weigel's access to the papal apartments is no more, and, insult to injury, he is also no longer welcome to stay at the American seminary while visiting Rome. Fessio recently had to admit in *The Washington Times* to misrepresenting Benedict's remarks. And Neuhaus is ranting in the pages of *First Things*.

What has changed for Ratzinger is not his theology but its context. After 25 years behind a desk, he is now a pastor. Until he became Pope, who had ever seen a picture of Ratzinger with a child? The highlight of Benedict's first year was an October Q-and-A with a group of children making their First Communion. One child asked what she should say to her parents when they want to sleep in or visit the grandparents on Sunday, instead of going to Mass. Benedict told the young girl that he was sure her parents had a lot to do and that she could perhaps suggest they look for a church near Grandma's house. Conservative Catholics may consider such pastoral solicitude unnecessary—after all, Catholics are supposed to go to Mass every Sunday, no excuses. The rest of us found it heartwarming. ■

Michael Sean Winters's book, Left at the Altar: How the Democrats Lost the Catholics and How the Catholics Can Save the Democrats, *will be published next year.*

Vive la France / By T.A. Frank

"A regular job contract in France is extremely protective. It's very, very hard to fire someone. It takes a long time."
—University of Paris Research Fellow Nicole Bacharan, interviewed on NPR.

10 March 1974 | Lettre de Discipline

Dear M. Letharge,

This is a warning letter. The length of your most recent lunch break, now entering its fourth day, can no longer be attributed solely to inexperienced waitstaff. Nor do we agree that we are "portion dictators."

—Le Management

10 June 1978 | Lettre de Discipline

This is a second warning letter. (We understand that your appeal of our March 1974 warning is pending.) Naturally, we were delighted by your return to work this week, and those employees who joined the company after 1976 were especially glad to meet you. Still, we cannot help but notice that your colleagues maintain an average sales level of 1.6 sets of our encyclopédies per day, while your total number since your start date in 1970 has remained at zero (or slightly below zero if one counts the set eaten by your bichon frisé). Also, your supervisor, M. Beaucul, could not help but notice the broken window on his Renault and your signed note saying, "I have your radio, little Toulousian girl." We ask that you return his radio, or, at the very least, turn it down when working at your desk.

—Le Management

14 May 1986 | Lettre d'Apologie

This letter constitutes an official apology, as ordered by Judge Droit. It was, as we now understand, entirely wrong of us to dismiss your complaints of seasonal affective disorder. We would be happy to have your rhesus macaque return to the office during the winter months to reestablish the tropical atmosphere you require. And we will move M. Dumas's desk so that the "flinging problem" is alleviated.

—Le Management

14 September 1989 | Lettre de Discipline

This letter is a warning, although we know that your appeal of our June 1978 warning is pending. (We congratulate you on having your March 1974 warning overturned on the basis of Surfeit Regulation 7B.) We remain committed to workplace equality, and we order that you immediately discontinue the blouse-tearing maneuver that you call "the cougar." It does not break the ice, as you claim, nor do doctors agree that it alleviates carpal tunnel syndrome. Also, we have additional questions for you about your new manager, since, after his meeting with you this morning, he was apparently found dead.

—Le Management

19 April 1992 | Lettre de Discipline

We congratulate you on having your June 1978 warning overturned (the judge was correct that the complaint about low encyclopédies sales levels no longer applies, given the shuttering of the division in 1984). Although we appreciate your postcards—and we agree that the family you've started is lovely—this letter is a serious warning about your absence. If you persist in living in Barbados, we cannot guarantee that your employment here will continue.

—Le Management

23 July 2002 | Lettre de Farewell

Thank you for the invitation to your retirement party, but we regret that we will be unable to travel to Brazil. Although we sometimes disagreed, it was rarely a problem after you stopped appearing at the office in the 1990s. Will you be sending anyone to collect your macaque? Boumboum has adjusted well to office life, and the "episodes" have tapered to once or twice a day. Finally, we note that our warning of September 1989 has been upheld, so that, if you were still working for the company, you would officially have one warning lodged against you.

—Le Management

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Against privacy and transparency.

Secret Service

BY WILLIAM J. STUNTZ

POLITICS IN THE age of information is often about secrets: who has them, who can keep them, who must tell them to whom. Can the NSA listen to my phone conversations? Can the police find out what books I buy or what movies I rent? Can I find out whether they know those things? As that set of questions suggests, secrets tend to pit individuals against the state. In the United States today, the left usually lines up with individuals; the right (though not always, and not unanimously) lines up with the state. Privacy and transparency—the twin concepts that government should know as little as possible about individual citizens, while those citizens should know as much as possible about the government—seem like quintessentially liberal ideas.

But one might think about the politics of secret information very differently. In order to govern wisely, the government should know as *much* as possible about those it governs. And the citizenry should know a lot less about government officials—otherwise, those officials will spend too much time and energy hiding from reporters and too little time and energy governing. In these terms, individual privacy and government transparency are deeply *conservative* ideas, because they keep government ignorant and inactive, and thereby prevent it from acting aggressively to right social wrongs.

That second view sounds upside-down—even crazy—but, until recently, it was the conventional wisdom. Fifty years ago, legally protected privacy barely existed. In most places, police officers searched when, where, and whom they wished, without fear of legal consequence. To a degree that would astonish Americans today, individual lives were as open—as transparent—as the windows in Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 hit movie *Rear Window*. Jimmy Stewart played a photographer who solves a murder while sitting in his apartment nursing a broken leg and spying on the people in the building next door—all of whom live their private lives next to open windows. Only the killer kept the lights out and the blinds drawn. Today, no one would buy the story, because *everyone's* blinds would be drawn.

While individual lives were more transparent, government was much less so. Enlightened opinion favored secrecy, not openness. That is how Joe McCarthy was brought to heel: Dwight Eisenhower created a broad doctrine of executive privilege and used it to shut off McCarthy's information flow. Everyone but right-wing kooks thought Eisenhower got that one right. Robert Caro's book on Lyndon Johnson's Senate years describes '50s floor debates in which senators were actually trying to persuade one another, apparently without fear that the public was listening in—since it wasn't. Those scenes are unimaginable today. Floor debates are televised; anyone can hear them and anything interesting will prompt substantial news coverage. But no one says anything interesting. Funny coincidence, that.

Secret government snooping sounds Orwellian. But Orwell guessed wrong about some things. Today, the danger that American democracy faces is not that rulers will know too much about those they rule, nor that too many decisions will be made without public scrutiny. Another danger looms larger: that effective, active government—government that innovates, that protects people who need protecting, that acts aggressively when action is needed—is dying. Privacy and transparency are the diseases. We need to find a vaccine, and soon.

BEGIN WITH SOME history. James Madison placed both privacy and transparency (though neither term) in the Bill of Rights, where they mostly lay dormant until the Supreme Court resurrected them during the '60s. Before that, the relevant provisions of the Bill applied only to the federal government—and, for most of that time, the federal government didn't do much. In the midst of that long hibernation, each of these legal concepts had a brief but telling moment in the sun.

Privacy's moment came in the late nineteenth century, when the Interstate Commerce and Sherman Acts seemed to herald the rise of federal regulation of big business. Privacy was code for laissez-faire constitutionalism, a legal club with which to beat back unwelcome economic regulation. For a time, the club worked. The Supreme Court concluded that ordinary subpoenas for financial records (regulating business without them is impossible) violated both the Fourth and Fifth Amendments because they interfered with "the privacies of life." Leading scholars believed that this privacy right belonged as much to corporations as to individuals. Until the justices renounced such claims (the key decision came in 1906), a full-scale collision between conservative federal judges and progressive elected officials—the kind that actually happened in the '30s in response to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, though on different legal grounds—looked imminent. The collision was avoided only because privacy yielded to government power.

Transparency's moment in the sun likewise flowed from pro-business conservatism. By 1946, FDR's political magic seemed to have died with him; that fall, Robert Taft's Republicans would score the party's biggest congressional victory between 1928 and 1994. During the run-up to the election, powered by the votes of conservative Republicans and ultra-conservative Southern Democrats, Congress passed the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). The APA was called an "administrative bill of rights"—in other words, a bill of rights for regulated businesses. Its goal was to rein

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in the executive agencies through which New Dealers regulated the economy, chiefly by making those agencies more open. Under the APA, agencies could no longer simply issue rules and regulations. Instead, they had to provide public notice of all proposed rules and give regulated businesses a chance to respond before the rules took effect. Businesses could appeal unfavorable regulatory decisions to then-friendlier federal judges. The winners were those who didn't want government agencies to do much governing.

That was no mere coincidence. Conservatives embraced privacy and transparency because they were inherently conservative ideas. The right to keep information private helps those who own the most information, and those who own information tend to own other things as well. Current Fourth Amendment law captures this point depressingly well. The law protects "reasonable"—meaning ordinary—privacy expectations. Poor people live less-than-ordinarily-private lives. The poor tend to live in apartments rather than detached houses, spend more of their lives in public spaces than in private ones (because their homes and workplaces tend to be small and unpleasant), and travel more by bus or subway than by car. By contrast, the lives of the wealthy are lived in spacious houses, offices, and cars. Like a tax code that charges the highest rates to those who make the least money, Fourth Amendment law protects houses more than apartments, private spaces more than public ones, and passengers in cars more than those who ride buses and subways.

Transparency also acts like a tax—a tax on activist government. Anyone who has worked in a large institution understands why. For every good idea about how the institution might run better, employees generate ten bad ones. So the key to producing good ideas is encouraging ideas of all sorts. And the key means of encouragement is secrecy. Transparency, by contrast, is the ultimate status-quo rule: It punishes all suggested deviations from the norm. No wonder pro-business conservatives of the '40s liked it so much.

How did these conservative ideas come to be embraced by the political left? With respect to transparency, the story is simple. Vietnam and Watergate made the left suspicious of government power generally and executive power in particular. When liberals looked for a way to make Richard Nixon's imperial presidency a little less imperial, they stumbled on weaponry that Taft's Republicans had used against Harry Truman: force the president to disclose as much as possible, as often as possible. It was an odd historical moment, a time when making government smaller and less active seemed a reasonable goal for the left. (A young Jerry Brown, then governor of California, made a name for himself by telling the world that "small is beautiful.") A quarter-century later, the world turned around again, as the right used the same weapon against Bill Clinton. In one sense, it backfired: Voters disliked the Lewinsky investigation and punished Republicans for it. But, while the right lost the battle, it won the war. Today and for the foreseeable future, presidents' personal relationships are open to press and public scrutiny. Which makes it harder for creative, energetic presidents to get things done.

Privacy, once the right's favorite right, became the left's friend thanks to the civil rights movement. In a time when J. Edgar Hoover was spying on Martin Luther King Jr. and Southern sheriffs were enforcing America's own version of apartheid, police snooping had a decidedly right-wing cast. When a liberal Supreme Court decided the time had come to rein in out-of-control cops, the justices used the legal tools that seemed best suited for that job: the Fourth Amendment's ban on unreasonable searches and the Fifth Amendment's prohibition of compelled self-incrimination. Constitutional texts designed by rich slaveholders in the late eighteenth century—texts used by rich corporations to protect laissez-faire economics in the late nineteenth century—became, in the late twentieth century, the chief means of protecting black suspects from abusive white cops. There was only one problem: It didn't work.

TO SEE WHY, you need to think like a police chief deciding where to put your officers. For violent felonies and thefts, the decision is easy: Go where the crimes are. Drug crimes are different—there are no immediate victims, no 911 calls. The police must decide where to look for them. And, since drugs are omnipresent, where the police look determines whom they catch.

Fourth Amendment law makes it more expensive to look in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. Upscale drug transactions take place indoors, with individually arranged meetings in different locations. Markets like that are hard for the police to penetrate. Privacy-based search and seizure rules like the Fourth Amendment's probable cause and warrant requirements make the job substantially harder. Open-air drug markets in poor neighborhoods are a piece of cake by comparison. Roll up, do the buy-and-bust, and go back to the station. No need to worry about privacy rules, since everything is out in the open.

Inner-city drug policing is often violent and nearly always humiliating to the targets of police attention, the vast majority of whom are innocent. (The NYPD arrests only one of every nine suspects its officers stop and frisk.) But the harms are not chiefly to privacy. So they don't count. We seem to have created the perfect system for policing the police—if the system's goals are to maximize protection for rich white kids from the suburbs and maximize police authority over poor black kids from central cities.

The results are predictable. As recently as 1980, just under half of all felony defendants were poor enough to receive a court-appointed lawyer. By 1992, the figure was 80 percent. According to the federal government's own data, white crack users outnumber black ones, but black crack *defendants* outnumber their white counterparts by twelve to one. The Fourth Amendment bears some responsibility for that sad reality. Not all responsibility, of course: Even the best imaginable search and seizure rules would leave police tempted to make too many drug arrests in poor

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areas and too few in rich ones. Still, instead of fighting that tendency, privacy-based search and seizure law reinforces it. In law as in medicine, that violates the cardinal rule of sound practice: First, do no harm.

That's not all. Most legal rights help the innocent and guilty alike, but they help the innocent more. Giving lawyers to all criminal defendants raises the odds of acquittal across the board, but the odds rise most for defendants who committed no crimes—because it will be easier for their lawyers to find evidence that exonerates them. A tougher burden of proof—beyond a reasonable doubt instead of more-likely-than-not—helps all criminal defendants, but it helps the innocent most, since it's easier to prove true propositions than false ones. The same is true of the requirement of unanimous jury votes to convict, the right to confront the government's witnesses, the right to appeal, and the list goes on.

But the point *doesn't* hold true for, say, limits on house searches or mandatory Miranda warnings as a prelude to police questioning. Those rules make it harder to gather evidence. That helps those against whom the evidence would be used. Innocent and guilty alike may enjoy the pleasure of knowing that the government isn't monitoring their phone calls. Only the guilty enjoy the added pleasure of knowing they won't be booking passage to the local penitentiary just yet.

Plus, in this context, anything that helps the guilty harms the innocent. Thanks to the rise of DNA testing, we are beginning to learn how many innocent men and women live in prison cells. The number is appallingly high. Some of them live in those cells because the police never learned who committed the crimes for which they were wrongly punished. Limits on evidence-gathering force courts to make decisions based on something less than the best evidence. That means less accurate trials. Some guilty criminals go unpunished. Worse, some innocent defendants are punished in their stead. Privacy's price is steep, and the bill is paid by society's most vulnerable members.

Now add terrorism to the mix, and remember that different forms of evidence-gathering are substitutes for one another. Anything that raises the cost of one lowers the cost of all others. The harder it is to tap our phones, the more government officials will seek out alternative means of getting information: greater use of informants and spies, or perhaps more Jose Padilla–style military detentions with long-term interrogation about which no court ever hears, or possibly some CIA "black ops," with suspected terrorists grabbed from their homes and handed over to the intelligence services of countries with fewer qualms about abusive questioning. In an age of terrorism, privacy rules are not simply unaffordable. They are perverse.

TRANSPARENT GOVERNMENT MAY be perverse, too. Consider the recently disclosed tape in which Governor Kathleen Blanco, FEMA Director Michael Brown, and various other state and federal officials discussed the response to Hurricane Katrina just hours after the storm made landfall. As the conversation happened, the situation was spiraling out of control. But the participants spent most of their energy congratulating one another (and themselves) and repeatedly saying that they stood ready to do anything that needed doing—while not actually doing anything. It was as if everyone in the videoconference expected the tape to be on the evening news.

Behavior like that would get you fired in the corporate world. But government officials have different incentives. Suppose you work in an agency that monitors security in the nation's airports. You have an idea, a way to make airports safer. What should you do? The answer seems easy: push the idea, try to get higher-ups to take it seriously. But that course of action carries serious costs. Higher-ups in government agencies tend to like things the way they are—innovation is politically risky; those who have a stake in the existing system may cause trouble. Meanwhile, even if the benefits of your new idea are substantial, neither you nor your bosses internalize them. Government agencies aren't like profit-maximizing businesses: They don't make money off of new ideas. And if the idea works—terrorists who could have attacked some airport now can't, because security is better—odds are, no one will know, because we rarely find out about events that might have happened but didn't. Ideas have price tags; the price is often high and always visible. Benefits may be high, too, but they're usually invisible. Keeping your head down and your mouth shut tends to be the smart move.

That scenario illustrates a basic truth about government: For most officials most of the time, the key choice is not between doing right and doing wrong, but between doing something and doing nothing. Doing nothing is usually easier—less likely to generate bad headlines or critical blog posts. Publicity raises the cost of doing something. That makes inaction more attractive, and it is plenty attractive already. Taft's Republicans had it right: A transparent regulatory state regulates little. Roosevelt's New Dealers had it right, too: Opacity is essential to a government that moves, acts, makes things happen.

And there is a larger problem. Transparency makes politics a running argument about decision-making, not about decisions. A few years back, Washington spent more time discussing which lobbyists were in the room when Dick Cheney crafted energy policy than actually debating energy policy. That perfectly captures the politics of transparency: The key questions are always who knew what and when, who was in the loop and who was left out. The merits disappear, drowned in a sea of procedural detail.

Nowhere is the focus on government process more destructive than in the work of counterterrorism. Law enforcement is a game of cat and mouse. The government makes its move, criminals respond, government adapts, and the game goes on. Thankfully, most criminals are not too bright, so the game is easily won. Terrorists are different; the most dangerous ones are smart and well-motivated. Whatever information they have, they will use. There is something deeply crazy about publicly debating what law-enforcement tactics the

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government should use to catch people who are happily listening to the debate and planning their next moves.

A difficult governance problem lurks in the shadows here. On the one hand, it is clear that free people will not remain so if government officials can do whatever they want—which is why someone, somewhere must place limits on what the government can do. But transparency throws out the baby with the bathwater. We avoid bad government ideas by punishing *all* ideas, and we tell our enemies exactly how they can best evade our efforts to catch them. There must be a better way.

THERE IS. ACTUALLY, there are several. The kinds of privacy people value most can be protected without disabling the government from gathering information. And, though transparency is a harder nut to crack, we can have a large measure of government secrecy without disabling key checks on the tendency of rulers to oppress those they rule.

Privacy first. Every year, tens of millions of Americans fill out their tax returns, giving the IRS a tremendous amount of information about their finances. The affront to privacy mostly goes unnoticed. Why? Because anonymity matters more than privacy. Two key propositions follow.

First, the more people whose lives the government invades, the better. When targets are few, anonymity disappears. If there were 100 tax forms filed instead of 100 million, the IRS might do more snooping than is healthy. The more phones are tapped, the less freedom is threatened.

Second, the initial invasion of privacy isn't the problem; subsequent disclosure is. The true image of privacy intrusion is not some NSA bureaucrat listening in on phone calls, but rather Kenneth Starr's leaky grand jury investigation, which splashed a young woman's social life across America's newspapers and TV screens. That is the nightmare worth protecting against. The best way to stop the nightmare from happening is to limit not what information officials can gather, but what they can *do* with the information they find. Leaks and press conferences are much bigger risks to privacy than wiretaps and satellite feeds. I have mixed feelings about the Valerie Plame affair, but one aspect of Patrick Fitzgerald's investigation is salutary: It reinforces the idea that government officials are obliged not to trumpet secret information. That idea has more to do with genuine privacy protection than anything in Fourth Amendment law.

Another limit matters still more, and it is one we have lost over the last generation or two. U.S. criminal law once covered fairly serious crimes and not much else. There were, to be sure, busybody laws against minor vices and allegedly deviant sex acts. But, for the most part, the government couldn't send you to prison unless it proved you had done something that you clearly shouldn't have done. Not anymore. American criminal codes have metastasized. That may be why so many people find privacy rights so attractive: Giving the government information seems dangerous, since there are so many ways government can use information to punish ordinary citizens. But this gets causation backward. Legal codes are too broad in part because information is too hard to get. The courts make gathering evidence more difficult, so legislatures give police and prosecutors tougher laws to use against those they investigate—another kind of cat-and-mouse game. Better to end the game and make the following deal: The government can find out what it wants about me, but it can't call the local paper and turn over the juicy parts, and it can't prosecute me unless I've done something that was clearly wrong and harmful. I'd have more freedom under that deal than I enjoy now.

Transparency is a tougher problem. How can we restrain agencies like the NSA that make decisions and carry out investigations in secret? Two responses are key. First, require *limited* disclosure: say, to the key congressional committees and to any courts designed to supervise the relevant process. Second and more importantly, as decision-making procedure becomes less transparent, bottom lines should become more so. Today, the pros and cons of different surveillance plans are debated in the press. But, when the government arrests and prosecutes terrorists, it does so under the table, charging immigration fraud or some other small-potatoes crime and hiding the real reasons for punishment. Consequently, no one knows how many terrorists the government has caught or what has become of them.

Sometimes—campaign finance is a good example—transparent procedure is valuable. As the rise and fall of Jack Abramoff illustrates, money often passes invisibly from lobbyists to politicians, with adverse consequences for democracy. Corruption aside, though, voters are generally better at judging bottom lines than at assessing government procedures. Twenty-first-century U.S. law and politics too often make bottom lines invisible, while leaving procedures open to public view. That may explain why our politics are both nastier and less productive than at any time in living memory.

Conservatives and liberals should be able to agree on these propositions. Getting privacy and transparency right is the key to making government work better. Conservatives should like that because, at least for now, they run the government. Liberals should want government to function better because they believe in it. America's greatest triumphs—fighting and winning the Civil War, battling the Great Depression, defeating first fascism and then communism, winning civil rights for African Americans—all happened because government *worked*. Today, it usually doesn't. The reasons sound surprising, but they would have made sense to Americans of generations past: We have too much privacy, and those who govern us have too little. ■

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The New York Times and lifestyle porn.

The Gray Lady Wears Prada

BY MICHELLE COTTLE

PRAISE JESUS AND pass the chinchilla, fur is hot again. For the last several years, the skinned-animal taboo has been receding, and now, with Beyoncé sporting the look and Neiman Marcus hawking fur scrunchies, everyone is panting after fashion's ultimate luxury symbol. Muffs, socks, mittens, wraps—you name the accoutrement, it can be upgraded with a touch of mink. Or, better yet, sable. When contemplating an expenditure of this financial and spiritual magnitude, however, it is important not to go off half-cocked, rummaging through the racks at any old department store. Not only must the merchandise be top quality, the shopping environs should offer reassurance that it is perfectly reasonable to drop five, even six figures on a piece of outerwear. The staff should display just the right degree of obsequiousness. Soothing music is a plus, proper lighting a must. And a cup of tea—or, better still, a splash of Veuve Clicquot—helps give the experience that extra bit of gilding. Because, without the proper atmospherics, the sacrament of buying a $20,000 sheared mink could wind up having all the luster of picking up a half-priced windbreaker at Target.

Thankfully, to help forestall such misfortune, *The New York Times*' Alex Kuczynski is on the case. The discriminating pen behind the popular "Critical Shopper" column, Kuczynski popped into celebrity furrier Dennis Basso's Manhattan salon not long ago to critique the ambiance, assess the service, and stroke the wares. Professing a squeamishness about fur ("I look at fur and think of Henry, my deliciously hairy miniature dachshund"), Kuczynski went looking to eviscerate: "I had been walking by the store all winter long marveling at the fur leg warmers strapped to the legs of the storefront mannequins; they look like the fur anklets worn by the grunting boy in 'Mad Max.'" But then the charming Mr. Basso, his welcoming boutique ("comfortable in a kind of Madison Avenue meets Las Vegas way"), and his incomparable pelts began to work their magic: "I pulled on a black mink coat ($30,000). ... Henry, forgive me: it was unlike anything I have ever worn: light as souffle, so silky and otherworldly I experienced the bizarre sensation of having never touched such material before." In the end, Kuczynski was so overcome that she picked up a yummy, chocolate-suede shearling coat for her birthday. ("It was $5,000, and all I can say is that I'm glad I spent the last year paying off my credit cards.") Her final assessment, as distilled in the handy box graphic:

Atmosphere Limousines idle outside; rococo inside.
Service Excellent.
Prices $1,000 to $150,000.
Key Looks Sable, chinchilla, mink, lynx.

Oh, how the mighty have fallen. In the spring of 2000, Kuczynski, then a media reporter for the *Times*' business section, took a stylish slap at Condé Nast's new shopping-themed magazine, *Lucky*, for "break[ing] new ground for an American magazine in so brazenly and nakedly looking and reading like, well, a carefully created catalog." Kuczynski's disdain wasn't just for the vulgar advertorial feel of *Lucky*'s content—"202 pages of stuff," typically accompanied by price and ordering information—but also for its very essence. "[T]he conceit that all women are interested in shopping as an activity—not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself—is not one to which every American consumer subscribes."

Six years later, *Times* readers can find Kuczynski penning a weekly column about the art and sport of shopping for "Thursday Styles"—a year-old section of the paper that, if one were feeling ungenerous, could be characterized as a smarter, higher-end variation on *Lucky*. Chock-full of product round-ups (complete with price and ordering info), online shopping tips, blurbs about store openings, and other features meant to be read with platinum card in hand, "Thursday Styles" is firmly dedicated to serving—and fueling—readers' urge to splurge. Need a new treadmill? "Thursday Styles" can help you decide whether to go with the $5,899 True Z5.5 Limited or the $4,499 Life Fitness T7-0. Wristwatch busted? Come explore the relative merits of the $28,500 Cartier Tortue versus the $10,900 Panerai Radiomir chronograph.

The *Times* is hardly breaking new ground with its foray into what may be best described as luxury porn. Most metro areas with the proper concentration of wealth boast at least one slick glossy peddling the luxe life. And, hot on the heels of "Thursday Styles," last September *The Wall Street Journal* introduced its own shopping-on-steroids section, suggestively titled "Pursuits." But it's one thing for a bunch of glorified ad vehicles—or even the rampantly capitalist *Wall Street Journal*—to be hawking designer duffel bags and skin cream priced higher than Jack Abramoff's legal team. After all, these publications unabashedly promote—and generally cater to readers who share—a Trump-esque mine-is-bigger-than-yours attitude toward wealth and consumption. It's quite another matter, however, for the venerable *Times* to lend its imprimatur to a genre so awkwardly at odds with its own high-minded liberal sensibility and intellectual pre-

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tensions. This, after all, is the same paper that, last year, ran an eleven-part series on class in America, in which it described economic mobility as "the promise that lies at the heart of the American dream" and exhaustively pondered its apparent decline. Social consciousness for *The Wall Street Journal* may mean crushing the welfare state, but, for the *Times*, it means earnest editorials packed with noblesse oblige. (Classic snippet from last Thanksgiving: "There is no shame in the poverty Americans suffer today. The shame adheres to those who do nothing to change it.") Wretched consumer excess may be the American way, but is it really the paper of record's business to lend it respectability? The disconnect is jarring enough that even "Thursday Styles" appears to be grappling with this question.

Meet Bertram Gabriel III—universally known as Trip—the man in charge of all things Stylish at the *Times*. The son of a New York toy executive–turned–Sun Belt real estate investor, Gabriel began his journalism career as a freelance writer, penning colorful pieces about international sports and outdoor recreation for publications including *Rolling Stone*, *Sports Illustrated*, and, of course, the *Times Magazine*. He joined the paper in 1994 as a reporter on the style desk, a remnant of the original "Styles of the Times" section launched in 1992 and killed just around the time of Gabriel's arrival. When the *Times* decided to relaunch the section in 1997, Gabriel was asked to spearhead the process and subsequently became the editor of the new "Sunday Styles," with its focus on fashion, leisure trends, sex, romance, and Manhattan society. ("When I'm feeling pretentious," he chuckles, "I think of it as the zeitgeist section.") Seven years later, when Managing Editor Jill Abramson needed someone to do the same for a new fashion and beauty-oriented section, Gabriel was an obvious choice. Now, a year into the job—and with his two fiefdoms recently combined and designated their own department—Gabriel is a dutiful defender of the "Thursday Styles" mission. As he noted in a recent phone interview, "I think people who whack it aren't comfortable with this new area of journalism about some of our tastes and consumption habits."

Clearly, the publishing industry has no such qualms. Luxury porn has blossomed over the past decade, driven in part by the proliferation of city-based "controlled-circulation" magazines—ad-driven glossies distributed gratis to households meeting certain economic criteria. (In the past year, not one but three such publications were launched in Washington, D.C., alone.) Other magazines, such as *Millionaire* (with its annual special issue, *Billionaire*), hawk the luxe life on a national scale, while still others focus on a particular category of consumption. *Elite Traveler*, in which featured accommodations often top $10,000 per night, instructs its readers (households with incomes over $1 million) on how to procure their own private island. *Robb Report* puts out a handful of luxury guides on subjects like home entertainment, vacation homes, and "ShowBoats." Similarly, *Millionaire* produces more than a dozen online magazines/shopping guides, each spotlighting a subset of extravagance like art, wine, cars, yachts, and private jets. These publications' business model is to attract advertisers with the richest readership possible. Ad buyers aren't promised a lot of eyeballs, just the right ones. (Why blow your budget tantalizing some schlub who cannot possibly afford a $42,000 Speedy Twilight watch from Louis Vuitton?) The stakes are high. The *Times* itself has reported that, by decade's end, Americans are on track to drop an estimated $1 trillion a year on luxury purchases.

With newspapers eternally on the hunt for ways to attract new readers—and, more importantly, new ad dollars—it was only a matter of time before the major dailies embraced luxury porn as well. The *Times* long ago laid the foundation by adding consumer news and lifestyle journalism. Former top editor Abe Rosenthal, in fact, is credited with legitimizing soft news—and, in the process, saving the *Times*—in the mid-'70s, when he overhauled the paper to include regular coverage of topics such as homes, cooking, gardening, and entertainment. Fascination with the rich also has a well-established history at the Gray Lady. As Nelson Aldrich recounts in *Old Money*, *Times* readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enjoyed detailed coverage of high society's comings and goings—who was invited to which soirees, who attended the Harvard-Yale boat races, how preparations were going for the famed Bradley Martin ball of 1896, and so on.

Far more recently, the *Times*' "Sunday Styles"—with its party pics, bold-faced names, and, most notably, its status confirming–status conferring wedding pages—quickly became a must-read for the elite and elite wannabes, as well as gawkers of every social stripe. But "Sunday Styles" has been fundamentally about people, not products, and its primary mission is anthropological. Debuting at a time when New York was less flush and more tribal, it provided readers with glimpses into different, albeit equally stylish, worlds—boho actors, Upper East Side ladies who lunch, gay chic. The focus today remains on the culture of the wealthy rather than just their stuff.

For the *Times*, the shift from anthropology to consumerism may have been nudged along by the bursting of the Clinton-era economic bubble. "Financial advertising, tech advertising, and business-to-business advertising took a big hit during the last recession, and it hasn't really recovered anywhere near to what it was before," says industry analyst John Morton. Shopping-focused sections, he notes, can help papers offset those losses by expanding their ad base to include more consumer ads. "Pursuits," for instance, is widely recognized as the *Journal*'s response to the evaporation of its financial and business-to-business ad streams.

Not that "Thursday Styles" was created with anything so crassly commercial in mind. According to Gabriel, the section is an organic product of staff brainstorming rather than the cynical, ad-driven, focus group–tested product that many people assume such offerings to be (and that *Journal*

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reporters admit "Pursuits" is). Planning discussions began in late 2004, and, by February 2005, a prototype of a new section focused on the fashion industry had emerged. (In fact, "Thursday Styles" was originally called "In Fashion," until staffers expressed concern that no male reader would ever embrace a section so named.) "We bundled with that other aspects of 'Styles' coverage that we weren't already doing elsewhere," Gabriel explains. "Most of it falls under the general category of coverage about appearance and image and what one sees looking in the mirror."

Indeed it does. On any given Thursday, "Styles" fans are treated to a mélange of articles examining the hottest trends in looking good—everything from virtual personal trainers to ayurvedic massage to butt implants—with a whole lot of couture coverage in between. The front page features two or three longer pieces, including a photo-laden fashion spread and a nonshopping-related "lifestyle" piece on topics like parenting or online dating. ("We also don't want to be totally superficial," Gabriel explains, before swiftly assuring me: "I don't consider fashion and beauty to be superficial.") Inside, the pieces are quick, frothy, and heavy on the artwork. Columns abound. But, unlike its Sunday counterpart, "Thursday Styles" focuses not on glamorous others but on you, the reader. The section is intended less to give you a glimpse of a rarefied world of privilege than to help you attain it. "Front Row" keeps an eye on the catwalk. "Open for Business" lists notable store openings. "Online Shopper" provides the thrill-of-the-hunt details from the columnist's latest Web quest for an espresso-bean grinder, a trip to Paris, or a raincoat for her pet papillon. "Physical Culture" features product round-ups and editors' picks with a fitness theme. And then there's "Critical Shopper."

ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU need to know about "Thursday Styles" can be gleaned from reading Kuczynski's weekly confection, which *Times* staffers cite as the breakaway hit of the section. Looking beyond the array of goods for which we shop, Kuczynski plumbs the foundation of American consumerism by analyzing the stores themselves. Manhattan-centric, with occasional forays to the outer boroughs and beyond, she dishes on which venues have the widest selection, the narrowest dressing rooms, the snootiest staff, the worst lighting, the loudest music, and the most appalling décor. Though periodically venturing down-market to, say, the Container Store or even Target, she is comfier in the land of Hermès scarves (of which she has twelve) and Jimmy Choo mules. Kuczynski's eye is keen, her wit sharp, and her perfectly sculpted brows perennially arched: At Versace's renovated flagship on Fifth Avenue, "the sales staff appears to have taken a handful of Friendly pills ... as if Versace's director of human resources lowered a net into America's heartland and brought back a school of sweet-natured kids, ready to string up some lights and put on a show in the barn."

Recognizing that, in this society, you are what you buy—or rather, you buy what you want to be—Kuczynski dabbles in sociology, deconstructing what certain retailers are *really* hawking. Ralph Lauren offers "the power of implied ancestry." The Brooklyn boutique Butter, by contrast, sells badges of intellectual and social awareness to people for whom "a pair of pants is an opportunity to express environmental protest, or a silent essay on the meaning of war, or an artistic tribute to the Japanese philosophy of wabi-sabi." Far from ducking the elitist focus of her beat, she makes constant, often snarky reference to it. At Versace, Kuczynski scorns a $4,600 purse, citing a "constitutional aversion to handbags that cost as much as the average Panamanian makes in a year." The lure of a $4,700 Dolce & Gabbana ensemble prompts a disquisition on the wealth gap: "I paused. Swooned. Perspective time. The top fifth of earners in Manhattan now make 52 times what the lowest fifth make: $365,826 compared with $7,047. Or, for every dollar made by wealthy households, poor households make about 2 cents. So if rich New Yorkers are paying $4,700 for a dress and jacket, the poorest would need divine intervention to help pay for the same bargain." True—although a peculiar digression for a woman who just a few months earlier had been extolling the magnificence and relative affordability of a Hermès Plume handbag: "At $4,900 or so, it is less expensive than the self-conscious Birkin ... [and is] the kind of crazily expensive but worthwhile possession that daughters will steal from their mothers' or grandmothers' closets in a few decades."

In fact, it's precisely this simultaneous mocking of, and wallowing in, our luxe-life obsession that makes "Critical Shopper" a creation of Frankensteinian genius. Plenty of *Times* readers may be dying to hear every last detail about the parking lot at Fred Segal's Melrose Avenue store, but some may feel a twinge of shame about their aggressive acquisitiveness. After all, the *Times* is bringing luxury porn to a much broader audience than, say, *Millionaire* or *Rich Guy* magazine. Those publications are preaching to the choir of conspicuous consumption—to readers who not only have scads of money but have few qualms, if any, about spending it ostentatiously. "Thursday Styles," by contrast, is seeking new converts, reassuring its more skeptical readers that there's really nothing wrong with showing off their good fortune. This is delicate work considering that even many ultra-affluent *Times* readers belong to the ambivalently wealthy ranks of the "Bourgeois Bohemians" profiled so piquantly in now-Timesman David Brooks's 2000 classic, *Bobos in Paradise*. A new breed of elites deeply conflicted about their material success, Bobos are morally appalled by any gaudy display that could make them look like "the vulgar Yuppies they despise." Writes Brooks: "Maybe off in Vegas there are still some rich peasants trying to conspicuously consume, buying big limousines, powerboats, and sports franchises and piling up possessions to demonstrate their net worth. But the Bobo renounces accumulation and embraces cultivation. He must show, in the way he spends his money, that he is conscientious and not crass." Unlike the typical in-your-face luxury porn, "Thursday Styles" grasps the conflicted code of the Bobo.

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Kuczynski personifies this understanding. Herself a product of privilege (her father is the prime minister of Peru), Kuczynski is a creature of the rarefied world of which she writes (and in which she shops). Yet she comes across as almost embarrassed by her affluence. "Yes, I bought myself a $5,000 shearling coat for my birthday," she e-mails me. "Do I regret writing about it in the column? No. I thought about it beforehand. I did marry a man who has been successful"—multimillionaire investor Charles Stevenson—"but I've always made my own money and that's what I use in my life. And, frankly, I'm not 25 years old. I mean, at a certain point (I was 37, turning 38, when I wrote that column), you're going to be able to afford to splurge on yourself once in a great while." Indeed, Kuczynski and her hubby both fancy themselves more grounded than your average Manhattan elites. The couple eschews the New York society circuit as spiritually defunct. "I find that the whole benefit scene is just a reason to party," Kuczynski told *W* magazine in a September profile. "Isn't it demented? People getting dressed up for this merry-go-round of benefits who've forgotten what they're supposed to be raising money for." Stevenson, meanwhile, expressed his conviction that "people who hold large amounts of money ultimately have corroded souls."

It's hard not to see these remarks as absurdly out of place in an article detailing the elaborate weekend house party that the couple hosts annually at their mountain retreat in Idaho ("aside from the masseuses, she and Stevenson flew in a yoga instructor, three chefs, and a trove of delicacies for the larder"), the six-carat diamond ring Kuczynski sports (having reportedly refused the nine-carat stunner Stevenson originally pressed upon her), and the pair's Upper East Side digs. ("The exclusive co-op is the subject of a forthcoming book by Michael Gross titled 740 Park: The Story of the World's Richest Apartment Building.") But this cognitive dissonance is what keeps "Critical Shopper" so in tune with Bobo angst. In one breath Kuczynski muses about what sort of "depraved" culture spends $300 on jeans ("I'll use the word, as Thurston Howell-ish as it sounds—dungarees"), and, in the next, describes buying a $168 pair for herself. Similarly, complaining about the drive out to a mall well north of the city, she once quipped, "On my deathbed, I would like to be able to say I read Pushkin in the original Russian, not that I spent 12,458 hours in the pursuit of shopping." It's fine to spend absurd amounts of time and money acquiring absurd stuff, Kuczynski is assuring us, so long as you recognize the absurdity. Because the real vulgarity isn't greed, but rather a lack of self-awareness.

While Kuczynski is its most elegant purveyor, this kind of intellectual jujitsu is sprinkled throughout "Thursday Styles," tucked neatly between the sidebars, product lists, and photo spreads. Some articles take random pokes at our spendthrift silliness ($70 for a doggie sweater!). Others are wholly devoted to the ugly side of the beauty industry (unlicensed plastic surgeons run amok) or consumerism in general (how Disney turned Cinderella from an icon of inner beauty into a tiara-hawking tart). With its wink-wink, nudge-nudge asides and deep-thoughts window-dressing, "Thursday Styles" lets us indulge our desire to buy—or even simply to fantasize about buying—obscenely expensive trinkets while maintaining our intellectual integrity. "There are incredibly subtle gradations of reverse snobbery and counter-reverse snobbery at play," quips one Timesman. The section practically screams: *Isn't this all so outrageous? Here, have another Zegna tie!*

Gabriel rejects accusations that "Thursday Styles" is all about conspicuous consumption—though not very convincingly. "I don't think we're trying to serve only those readers who can afford a $10,000 watch," he objects, referring to a recent roundup of timepieces that double as "conversation piece[s]." When assigning a story like that, you always try to include a range of prices, he insists. "We didn't do a Swatch, but I'm sure we had a watch in there for a few hundred bucks." (In fact, the least expensive was an $890 Prada.) Realizing how elitist even this might sound, Gabriel tries again—"When you think about the fact that watches are jewelry..."—before pausing, switching gears, and musing about the section's audience. "I don't know what the demographics of our readership are, but I can guess. The paper's read by a lot of people, but I think there are some generalities." (In other words, "Thursday Styles" is not intended for the wash-and-wear crowd.) Love it or hate it, says Gabriel, luxury porn reflects a cultural reality. "People shop the same way people dine out, the same way people decorate their homes. These are consumerist pursuits. We are another department of basically consumerist pursuits—about the kinds of things that give people pleasure." Apparently satisfied with this characterization, he reiterates, "We are a section about people's pleasures."

Still, even Gabriel cannot prevent a shadow of Bobo unease from occasionally creeping into view. "Sure, some people are appalled," he says of the section, before quickly noting, "but I don't get any complaints any more internally." The *Times* is "fully behind its Styles coverage," he assures me, and he is personally committed to seeing that the beat is handled with the "integrity and aggressiveness and balance and thoroughness and sophistication" expected of the paper. "I hope we never embarrass ourselves," he says, not exactly setting the success hurdle sky high. "I think it's a great achievement not to fall on your face when you're doing this kind of news on a weekly basis."

More to the point, Gabriel tells me, the section isn't just about fluffy stuff. "Thursday Styles" also prides itself on running "hard-hitting lifestyle stories that are not about buying something." These pieces, "which try to look a little more deeply at how people live their lives apart from what they buy," are of tremendous importance to the section, Gabriel stresses. "There is always [such] a story, every single week on the front page." He stops, thinks for a moment, then corrects himself. "Tomorrow is the exception." ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Traditions

NOT MUCH IN FILM-GOING is as inviting as a French picture, if it is well made and its chief aim is to take us aboard rather than to affect us in any serious way. The leading characters are—in the best of this type—prosperous (Parisians preferably), with a difficulty just sufficient to keep the picture going for ninety minutes or so. How pleasant it is to inhabit their attractively furnished homes, to visit their favorite restaurants and cafés, to find taxis just when we need them, to be sophisticated in any emotional weather. (Even to smoke heavily without risk.) Other countries have national myths that underlie some of their films, and those myths are cherished both at home and abroad. The sophisticated couple whose dwellings are lapped in good taste and who are virtually unshockable are apparently dear to the French—and are like tourist posters for others.

NATHALIE
(Koch Lorber)

DON'T COME KNOCKING
(Sony Pictures Classics)

Try, for instance, to imagine **NATHALIE** as an American film. Impossible. Not because our apartments and offices couldn't look like these (though it is unlikely), but because its moral views would be either more comic or more grave. In Jacques Fieschi's screenplay, a fortyish wife named Catherine discovers that her husband, Bernard, dallies elsewhere. She wants to find out how he behaves with other women, so she engages an upper-level hooker, Marlène, to have an affair with him. To forestall any suspicion in Bernard of the plot, Catherine and Marlène invent a "normal" character for Marlène to play with him, named Nathalie. Marlène-Nathalie reports to Catherine regularly on her affair with Bernard.

Disregard the unlikelihood of the story, especially since Catherine is a practicing gynecologist. (Bernard is a businessman.) Disregard, too, the fact that, about midway through the film, we can guess a good deal of the ending. The real point of the picture is to enjoy the places designed by Michele Barthélémy, the color-hungry cinematography of Jean-Marc Fabre, and our time with the three principals.

Whatever the plot, it is soothing to be in the company of Fanny Ardant, who plays Catherine and whose twenty-five-year career is dotted with small treasures. (The title role in *Callas Forever*, the fickle wife in *Colonel Chabert*.) And who could be more erotic without working hard at it than Emmanuelle Béart? (A source of fascination ever since *Manon of the Spring* in 1985.) And what in the world is left to say about Gérard Depardieu? (Danton, Cyrano, Colonel Chabert himself.) For several decades he has been a mainstay of French film, and although the role of Bernard demands more of his sheer presence than of his acting, it is a presence worth savoring. Also, it gives us the chance to realize again that he is the only film star in history with a cleft in the tip of his nose. Others have had it in their chins—Kirk Douglas, Cary Grant. But the nose? Only Depardieu.

The director, Anne Fontaine, has made, among others, a previous pleasant picture called *Dry Cleaning*, and she has kept *Nathalie* smooth and flowing and as convincing as it needs to be. She seems to understand that basically, under the story, she is articulating again a myth that is valued at home and abroad.

A different tradition is explored in **DON'T COME KNOCKING**—two of them, actually. This picture re-unites the German director Wim Wenders and the ultra-American writer Sam Shepard, who collaborated on *Paris, Texas* in 1984, and it seems much further down the road than twenty-two years. Wenders was a leading figure of the so-called New German Cinema, as both director and producer, but his work has declined since the 1980s, in part because of his infatuation with American films. Sometimes he almost seems to yearn for reincarnation as a Yank. Shepard, one of our leading playwrights, seems to have drained his imaginative faculties of late and has been revisiting rather than creating. The fact that these two men have rejoined at this relatively parched point in their artistic lives feels like more than coincidence; they seem to have sought each other as if each were a canteen in the desert for the other to drink from.

But the content of the canteens is brackish. Wenders and Shepard collaborated on the story, as they did with *Paris, Texas*, and then Shepard wrote the screenplay. The apparent intent was to juxtapose two legends, Western films and the West itself, to make a Western film star a symbol of the West's decline. That star, Howard Spence, absconds from the location where he is acting in a picture and moves into the West. He goes to visit his mother for the first time in thirty years, and she tells him that he has a son whom he has never met: he has not seen the boy's mother since their affair.

Howard goes on to the town where Doreen, the boy's mother, lives and runs a bar, where the son sings. Howard's meetings with both of them are slanty and difficult. He is concerned yet tentative, afraid of both responsibility and feelings. These encounters have little to do with what the film is apparently intended to explore; they could have taken place in New Jersey. The picture yearns for a significance that it never approaches. (I omit details about a young woman who wanders through the film carrying a vase that contains the ashes of her mother, who also was once a lover of Howard's.) All of these doings seem designed essentially to bring about one shot—rather, repeated visits to this shot. The son has a quarrel with his girlfriend and throws her belongings out of his window. Among them is a sofa that lands, broken, in the middle of the street, surrounded by other odds and ends.

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Howard sits on this sofa quite a lot toward the close of the picture, and this image of discard and desolation is clearly precious to director and author. (Wenders does not omit the arty cliché of circling the sofa with the camera.)

Some oddities. All this stuff coming out the window and remaining in the middle of the street arouses no response whatsoever from any other house on the street. Add that Howard is a veteran film star who is recognized by only one other person in the film, and that person was a schoolmate. Also add that the film company, in the middle of a production, sends only one (peculiar) detective to find its missing star. And add that Howard keeps talking about the slump of his life although he is evidently a success. The total of these matters is, at best, dubiety. But factual doubt is less damaging to the film than thematic hollowness and pretense.

Yet Wenders and Shepard made one admirable move. They engaged Shepard, the actor, to play Howard. It has long been clear that Shepard is a rare double talent. He has flourished, rightly, as a playwright, and he is also a compelling film actor. His face does more for the reality of this picture than anything he wrote in the script. ■

JED PERL ON ART

A Defense of Dada

DADAISM, THE TO-HELL-with-art art movement that began in Zurich nearly a century ago, is the subject of a rivetingly lucid exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. The show is nothing if not timely, for the visual arts are currently awash in Dadaist gestures and gambits of one variety or another. The contrast between Dadaism then and Dadaism now is going to unsettle a lot of assumptions about the nature of this movement that erupted in the midst of World War I, and about how the Dadaist gene pool—which contained nihilism and quietism, politicization and aesthetic ism, hyperpersonalization and depersonalization—has shaped the anything-goes sensibility of the present.

DADA
(National Gallery of Art)

Marcel Duchamp, who is widely regarded as the coolest art dude of them all, shares billing in the National Gallery with artists of widely varying sensibilities. They range from George Grosz, whose acidic social satire has roots in the nineteenth century, to Hans Arp, whose wittily curving abstract forms are one of the twentieth century's sublimely clarifying visions. If the essential Dadaist impulse is a destabilizing one—a desire to unsettle conventions, artistic and otherwise—this exhibition forces us to consider how many forms destabilization can take, how many different meanings and implications it can have.

This exploration of Dada—which travels to the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the summer—takes a steady look at a group of artists who conceived of themselves as a moving target. Leah Dickerman, the curator at the National Gallery who orchestrated the immensely complex undertaking, has given the show a beautifully coherent structure. There are six sections that highlight activities in as many cities—Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris—and suggest a meandering but roughly chronological trajectory, running from events at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich during World War I to the movement's absorption or eclipse by Surrealism in the mid-1920s. This is, of course, a heterogeneous display. There are paintings, sculptures, collages, prints, drawings, photographs, found objects, and many of the wonderfully designed posters, broadsides, books, and magazines that have earned Dada its premier position in the development of a modern typographical style. There is also some attempt to recapture the sights and sounds of Dada theater and décor—Sophie Taeuber's goofily geometricized marionettes for a 1918 production of an eighteenth-century play; and a partial reconstruction of the futuristically angled interior of Kurt Schwitters's ongoing environmental experiment, which he dubbed the *Merzbau*; and a smattering of audio effects that suggest the atmosphere in the cabarets and recital halls where the Dadaists took turns trying to antagonize or to bemuse or to seduce the public.

In Washington the show is pulling in younger museumgoers, who seem to enjoy strolling through galleries where the art is by turns easygoing, quizzical, and rambunctious. The Dadaist universe has a charmingly low-tech appeal, at least when compared with the computer-generated look of a lot of recent art. There is a mellowness about the way the Dadaists put the moves on the audience, and I have the impression that the college-age kids who are making their way through the show appreciate the nerd-next-door awkwardness of even some of Dada's most devious inventions. For museumgoers who are familiar with what the self-appointed grandchildren of the Dadaists have been up to of late—I am thinking of the deadeningly overproduced multimedia extravaganzas that Damien Hirst and Mike Kelley have mounted at the Gagosian Gallery in New York—one of the most striking things about this show is the modest scale of so much of the work and its schoolboy abashedness. It is hard not to warm to the cottage-industry aspect of the original Dadaists—though whenever I begin to appreciate the adorableness of one of Duchamp's Readymades, I feel the need to remind myself that charlatans have been known to operate out of cottages, too.

BUT IF THE DADAISTS OF THE first quarter of the twentieth century look like a kinder, gentler breed of anti-artists, this is not merely because the now sepia-toned shock tactics of Duchamp, Hugo Ball, Francis Picabia, and Hannah Höch are easier for skeptics to tolerate. There is a real difference between anti-art then and anti-art now, and it is the difference between an experimental method and what has become a defensive posture, a production value, a marketing ploy. There is an optimism and a flexibility about the spirit of these pioneers. They are inventing a world, and they accept that this world has more than its share of confusions. If the exact nature of Dada has remained unclear, this is in part because, as the Dutch painter Theo van Doesburg pointed out in 1923, "Dada does not

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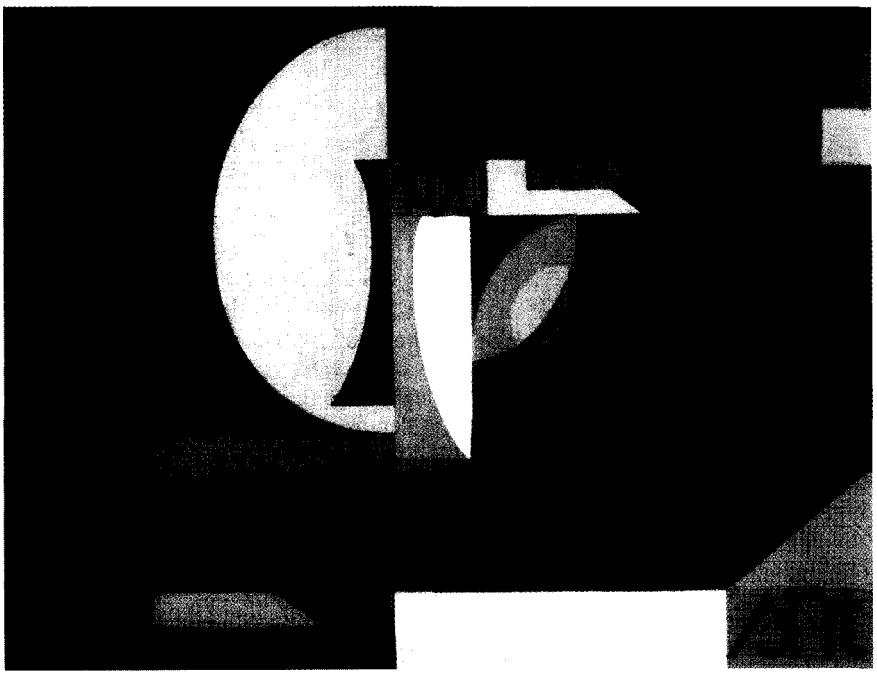
want to be understood intellectually." The problem begins with the name itself. Dickerman describes it as "an obscure and infantile word meaning 'hobby horse' in French," which Richard Huelsenbeck and Hugo Ball found in 1916 in a French-German dictionary. Ball says that a Dadaist is a "childlike, Don Quixotic" being.

Many of the essential Dadaist figures—Ball, Huelsenbeck, and maybe even the poet Tristan Tzara—were at least as much activists as they were writers or performers, so that disentangling the relationship between theory and action can be as vexing as trying to pin down all the nuances in the arguments among the socialist thinkers of the same period. Dadaism emerged from the maelstrom of World War I, and even as the artists were mocking the titanic failures of the ruling class, they were arguing with other critics of the war. Huelsenbeck, in the "First Dada Speech" in Berlin in 1918, was ribbing the pacifists when he said that the Dadaists were in favor of war, because "things have to collide: the situation so far is nowhere nearly gruesome enough." The Dadaist, Huelsenbeck explained in another manifesto, "no longer confronts life aesthetically." Instead, "the best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, holding fast to the intellect of their time, bleeding from hands and hearts." If this sounds fairly foolish, we should remember that the power of polemic has a way of evaporating along with the smoke-filled evenings during which such wild assertions are born. Perhaps Huelsenbeck himself didn't know quite how far he wished to go.

Nobody will ever agree about the extent to which the Dadaists regarded art as a tool for social transformation, or saw the rejection of the high art traditions as a statement about the obsolescence of tradition in general, or were mostly interested in reshaping art. Whatever particular artists or poets happened to believe—and surely many people thought different things at different times—Dada as a whole must be understood in relation to the broader phenomenon of the avant-garde. At least seventy-five years before the Dadaists burst onto the scene, many artists and writers had already recognized that the bankruptcy of official culture in nineteenth-century Europe left the fate of culture in the hands of a self-appointed minority, which like all self-appointed minorities would be constantly struggling to establish its legitimacy and clarify its direction. Although the Dadaists dreamed of shocking a large swath of the middle class, and did at times aim to connect with the working class, one suspects that their audience was mostly very small and made up of the progressive and the artistically minded.

Matthew S. Witkovsky, a curator at the National Gallery, has observed in *The Dada Seminars*, an essay collection published to accompany the show, that the Dadaists regarded the writing of letters and the publication of books and journals and manifestos as a new form of creative activity. Artists and writers in different cities and countries were constantly exchanging images and ideas and reveling in the play of fresh thoughts and visions and feelings, so much so that the very process of communicating became an artistic act—a torrent of absurdist communications that suggested a darkly comic variation on World War I's torrent of military and diplomatic communications. Witkovsky might argue that Dada was itself the name of a debate—a debate about the nature of artistic experience that was recorded in the jangling asymmetries of Dadaist typography. And Leah Dickerman makes it clear that within this debate Dada's nihilistic strains were constantly opposed to a variety of other artistic ideas and ideals—Cubist conceptions of structure, Expressionist techniques of social criticism, the mystical and idealist tendencies in abstract art.

Dada represented the avant-garde in extremis. Here avant-gardism became an argument not only about the direction of art but also about the significance of art, and whether artists, who were by their very nature a minority, could ever realize their dreams. While the thought of turning avant-gardism into an endgame was always a possibility that the Dadaists considered—and that Duchamp ultimately embraced—Dada emerges in this exhibition as yeasty and open-ended. Dada, which erupted out of the tragedy of war, could nevertheless not help but be optimistic, quite simply because it was an aspect of the avant-garde, and to be involved in the avant-garde was to believe in the possibilities of culture. History may have moved toward despair, but art moved away from it. The Dadaists raised their voices in the great conversation that was the early twentieth-century avant-garde—a conversation in which classicism was as important as pranksterism, in which idealism was as important as nihilism; and in the midst of that conversation, even the silliest and most trivial ideas could matter.



COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

SOPHIE TAUEBER, *Untitled (Composition Dada, Flat Head)*, 1920

Dada was culture in the old modern sense: it was culture as the expression of personal values. Of course the Dadaists were inclined to believe that in the mod-

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ern world personal values were on the verge of becoming (if they had not already become) kitsch. And they were not above disguising what ought to have been their honest objections to old-fashioned humanism behind their own kind of newfangled pomposity. But the Dadaists had a point when they reminded their fellow artists and writers that artistic responsibility has no particular form, but depends on the ability of the artist ceaselessly to invent and re-invent a multiplicity of forms. In 1920, André Gide wrote a brief essay about Dada, in which this master of modern classicism praised a "venture of negation." He began by observing with surprise that in Europe in the wake of World War I, "while our fields, our villages, our cathedrals suffered so much, our style alone should remain untouched!" And he went on to say that "it is essential that the spirit not lag behind matter; it has a right to ruin. Dada will see to this.... Before rebuilding it is essential to cast down what still seems solid, what makes a show of still standing." Gide was genially ironic about a Dadaist event that he had attended in Paris and found dishearteningly tame. He had plenty of reservations about Dada, and hoped that the best of the young artists would soon find it confining; but he also saw the value of the Dadaist negation.

Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber, the two artists who dominate the opening galleries of this exhibition, were as much classicists in their passion for clarity and resolution as they were Dadaists in their fascination with the unpredictable, the unexpected, the heretofore impossible. Their feeling for visual elegance casts a spell that sweetens the entire exhibition. Perhaps the most striking products of this moment in twentieth-century art when anti-rationalism and aesthetic purism converged are the collages that Arp began to produce in 1916—"according to the laws of chance," as he put it. Arp dropped rectangular or roughly rectangular bits of colored paper on a piece of paper and then proceeded to affix them wherever they had happened to land. The results achieve a paradoxical order, so much so that what Arp described as chance may strike us as being more like an old-fashioned combination of technique and inspiration.

The critic Carola Giedion-Welcker once observed that there is a "paradoxical combination" in Arp's work of "mocking fantasy and classical serenity," but surely Arp and Taeuber, who were married to each other, believed that it was only through a Dadaist purging of all conventional artistic assumptions that a renewed lucidity, which would look like a kind of classicism, could come to the fore. The great *Untitled (Duo-Collage)* that Arp and Taeuber collaborated on in 1918, with its impassive grid of black and gray rectangles punctuated by a few silver-leaf elements, is a work of opulent asceticism. This beautiful composition has some of the tamped-down resonance of Gregorian chant. Taeuber, whose untimely death in 1943 was a blow from which Arp recovered only after a long struggle, has been the subject of considerable attention in recent years. The works in this exhibition, including an *Untitled (Triptych)* in oil, a series of curious chalices and heads made of turned wood, and geometric embroideries, some of which were collaborations with Arp, are pioneering achievements in a restrained lyric mode that engaged artists as varied as Mondrian, Malevich, Josef and Anni Albers, the early Hélion, Auguste Herbin, Ellsworth Kelly, and Donald Judd.

While Arp's and Taeuber's work during the war years suggests an abrupt leap into abstraction, at least when compared with Mondrian's gradual disassembling of landscape space, all of these artists were interested in the expressive possibilities of formal processes. This helps to explain why van Doesburg, a central figure in the De Stijl movement in Holland who put his faith in the ordering power of the simplest geometric forms, was himself fascinated by Dada. Van Doesburg developed an alter ego by the name of I. K. Bonset, whom he described as a Dutch Dadaist, and the imposture was so successful that Mondrian warned van Doesburg against this fictive figure, whom he worried was stealing De Stijl ideas. One man who was quite close to van Doesburg was Kurt Schwitters, whose collages and constructions and sculpted interiors pushed Cubist collage's mingled ideas of order and disorder into a hyperbolic disorder that sometimes, paradoxically, suggested a new kind of order. The work of Arp and Taeuber and Schwitters and van Doesburg—and the abstract films of Hans Richter, with their appearing-and-disappearing skeletal geometries—reflect "a deep belief in the spiritual or uplifting potential of art." This is how Dorothea Dietrich, a contributor to the catalogue, characterizes a piece of prose signed by Schwitters, Arp, van Doesburg, and others called the "*Manifest Proletkunst*"—the very title suggests that for a number of the Dadaists, social idealism could be joined with artistic idealism.

Some may argue that the design of this exhibition tends to overemphasize the local colorations that Dada took in different places. But it was probably inevitable that in Paris, the center of the avant-garde for much of a century, Dada would become only the latest in an endless cycle of intellectual and artistic debate, while in New York, where the avant-garde rarely had a public role, Dada would seem more inward-turning. In Zurich, in a neutral country, there was a free-floating and generally apolitical absurdism in the performances that Hugo Ball gave at the Cabaret Voltaire, where he wore a costume of cylindrical shapes, rather like an Arp or a Taeuber come to life, and read his poem "Elephant Caravan" as if it were a bohemian liturgy. In Berlin and other German cities, where the dreadful aftermath of World War I was experienced especially intensely, Dada was more closely allied with political action and social protest. Huelsenbeck became involved with the social satirist George

ROSEANNE BACKSTEDT

Birds Crossing Burgundy and Green, 84 x 72 inches, acrylic on unstretched canvas

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Grosz and made critical remarks about Schwitters, whom he disparaged as a romantic and a mystic.

The crystalline beauty that is one of the fascinations of the earlier galleries of the exhibition abruptly vanishes when we move to Berlin, and although Grosz brings a wonderful intricacy and clarity to his graphic work, the paintings that he and Otto Dix were doing, with their scabrous vision of metropolitan life, are hopelessly tendentious and murky; and Hannah Höch's collages of newspaper clippings, with their labyrinthine mapping of the corruption of postwar Germany, are frustratingly claustrophobic. Some will say that the visually unresolved qualities of such works are meant to operate metaphorically, as an assault on the viewer. But the ugliness of the figures in, say, Georg Scholz's *Farmer Picture*, in which the family members look like barnyard animals, is just old-fashioned caricature, now pressed into service in a painting where the cartoonist's one-liners lose energy. What happened in Berlin was that Dada's self-consciously radical program was joined with a newfangled brand of old-fashioned storytelling, and this alliance can look a lot like a resurgent academicism.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY SHOW is a cornucopia. A room of Schwitters's work includes two elegant marquetry boxes done after his designs, with the zigzagging collage images re-imagined as if by a rococo craftsman. There is a chilling story about one of these boxes, which was made for a woman who eventually married El Lissitzky and ended up in the gulag, where she managed to hold on to this strangely beautiful object, a souvenir of the shattered hopes of the avant-garde. Elsewhere in the show we are given a fairly close look at the early work of some artists who would eventually be associated with Surrealism, especially Max Ernst, whose collages have a clockwork intricacy of connected parts, and Man Ray, whose dark, lustrous abstract photographs join ordinary objects in a velvety dream world. Everywhere there are superb graphic works, especially the issues of Schwitters's *Merz* magazine and portfolios; he said that "'Merz' stands for freedom from all fetters," and in his typographic experiments bluntly proletarian nineteenth-century typefaces are recombined to achieve a pulsing rhythmic authority. Among the curiosities included are reconstructions of some of the earliest mannequin sculptures, including the pig-faced *Prussian Archangel* by John Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter. At times this exhibition has the quality of an old curiosity shop, which is perhaps inevitable. Once the Dadaists had rejected the framed oil painting and the sculpture on its pedestal in favor of photography, typography, collage, assemblage, the found object, and the Readymade, they were to some extent fated to wind up producing trinkets and trophies.

With Picabia and Duchamp, who dominate the later galleries, the trinkets and trophies take on an ever-increasing vehemence. Dada is redefined as an aestheticization of protest through a series of paintings and objects that are so insolently inscrutable as to turn the free-standing value of art against itself. Picabia and Duchamp do not engage with society in the way that the Berlin Dadaists did, nor do they aim to recapture the old magic of art like Arp, Taeuber, and Schwitters. An impersonality grounded in an admiration for machines and mass production was frequently the stylistic impulse behind their work. The paintings by Picabia with which this exhibition ends, with their silhouetted figures and disks and stripes, are listless, their bright colors and clear outlines notwithstanding. Picabia demonstrates as much feeling for paint as a stenographer demonstrates for language.

As for Duchamp's Readymades—the *Bicycle Wheel*, *Bottlerack*, *Hat Rack*, and snow shovel that were purchased in hardware stores—their radical simplicity does set them apart in an exhibition where so many objects have a collaged elaborateness that suggests Victorian nightmares. The Readymades are related to the traditional museum object in much the way that Melville's Bartleby is related to the ordinary office worker. They simply refuse to engage—inexplicably, incontrovertibly. The Readymades hold their own here through the sheer pigheadedness with which they remain what they are, once again refusing the aggrandizement that they have invited for some ninety years.

LEAH DICKERMAN PRESENTS Duchamp as an artist among equals. That's brilliant. By 1920 he was a legend to those in the know, but perhaps more or less a nobody everywhere else. Certainly he was no longer quite the celebrity that he had been in America when his *Nude Descending a Staircase* was shown at the Armory Show in 1913. In the 1920s, Duchamp devoted a good deal of time and energy to his chess game, even as he was spreading the message of modern art in the United States through the Société Anonyme, the organization that he founded with Katherine Dreier in order to sponsor some of the earliest and most adventuresome exhibitions of modern art in New York. This man who did so much to further the American understanding of Brancusi and many other artists surely recognized that the nihilism of which he was such an astute student was only one strand in the richly braided story of the avant-garde. But Duchamp always masked his true feelings behind a filigree of enigmatic pronouncements. Perhaps he had no true feelings.

Who can say whether Duchamp's attacks on what he called "retinal art"—on all art, in other words, for all art aims to engage and delight the eye—were conceived in the personal terms that he sometimes described, or were in fact a thoroughgoing attempt to bring about the end of art itself? What is certain is

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that for most of Duchamp's life, retinal art was what most artists and collectors and connoisseurs and gallerygoers and museumgoers continued to believe in, so that even this Dadaist's most vehement assertions remained marginal. If some people today believe that the Readymades are as important as (or more important than) anything done by Picasso, Mondrian, Matisse, or Bonnard, Duchamp is scarcely to blame. In any event, it is reassuring to see how small they look in the Dada show, where the Readymades reclaim what must have been their original status as witty asides in a great debate. The message of the Readymades, which is that anything can be a work of art, is one that perhaps could not be avoided at a time when abstract art was overturning so many age-old assumptions about the nature of art. The Readymade is a reductio ad absurdum, and the pity is that so many people have regarded that absurdity as the foundation of a new aesthetic.

As for what has become Duchamp's most famous work, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (which when read aloud in French sounds like "she's got a hot ass"), the small reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* on which he drew a moustache and a goatee, it has been blown up to billboard size for a banner that hangs outside the entrance to the National Gallery. The sweet irony of this pop come-on is that the National Gallery actually has in its collection one of Leonardo's portraits, the *Ginevra de' Benci*, a work perhaps even greater than the *Mona Lisa*. Museumgoers can take a quick walk from Duchamp's altered *Mona Lisa* at the entrance to the East Wing to Leonardo's magical portrait in the West Wing, and if their reaction is that in the end there ain't nothin' like the real thing, all I can say is that Duchamp was nobody's fool, and in a certain mood he would probably have agreed.

Surveying the Dadaist adventure from the distance of a century, what is most striking is how passionately these artists believed in art. Even when they railed against its power, they were acknowledging its power and what it meant to them. Dickerman and the other curators and historians involved in this show have set out to see Dada on its own terms, neither as a prologue to Surrealism nor as the theoretical basis for Pop Art and the various anti-art movements of the 1960s and 1970s. "Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage," William Rubin's exhibition in 1968 at the Museum of Modern Art, is saluted as a pioneering effort even as Dickerman observes that the inclusion of 1950s works by Johns, Rauschenberg, and Tinguely tended to obscure the historical picture. Dickerman has been working toward this exhibition for a long time. In 2003 she edited a special issue of *October* devoted to Dada, and the proceedings of a number of conferences held at the National Gallery have now been published as *The Dada Seminars*. In her view, there was nothing cynical about the cynicism of the founding fathers and mothers of Dada. There may have been an element of comedy about their cynicism, but there was an element of idealism, too. The challenge that faces a would-be Dadaist today is the same challenge that faces any painter or sculptor, namely to recapture the visionary optimism that is the heart and the soul of the artistic enterprise.

Like so many atheists, the Dadaists were true believers of a sort. Late in life, when Arp was carving blocks of marble into classical forms that somehow still embodied a Dadaist's doubts, he reminisced about the Dada years. "The important thing about Dada, it seems to me, is that the Dadaists despised what is commonly regarded as art, but put the whole universe on the lofty throne of art," he wrote, "we declared that everything that comes into being or is made by man is art. Art can be evil, boring, wild, sweet, dangerous, euphonious, ugly, or a feast to the eyes. The whole earth is art. To draw well is art.... The nightingale is a great artist. Michelangelo's *Moses*: Bravo! But at the sight of an inspired snow man, the Dadaist also cried bravo." Put this way, the Dadaist creed is quite simply a celebration of the open-mindedness of the avant-garde, and most of the artists I know would agree with a good deal of what Arp has to say. Not the least of the strengths of Dickerman's exhibition is that one may leave it believing that Arp, not Duchamp, is the essential Dadaist hero. Arp's youthful Dadaist optimism puts Duchamp's withering skepticism in its rightful place—not an entirely dishonorable place in twentieth-century art, but a very small place. Dada deserves better than Duchamp. ■

David Rieff

Optimism Goes to War

Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq
By Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor
(Random House, 603 pp., $27.95)

Self-doubt, let alone pessimism, is generally not part of the mentality of people who start wars, and certainly not of those who plan to unleash the most powerful army in the history of the world against a third-rate ill-equipped military force commanded by a man whom one Marine commander described as "dumb as a rock" and his two psychopathic and hopelessly incompetent sons. Three years after our invasion of Iraq, an elective war, we know that the optimism not only of the senior members of the Bush administration, but also of the many liberal hawks who supported the toppling of Saddam Hussein, was misplaced. But while the current Bush administration rationale for why things did not go as anticipated in Iraq is just a hackneyed military cliché—that no war plan survives the first contact with the enemy—the salient question is whether the disappointments in the Iraq war are owed to the illusions that attend all war planning (we might call it, with apologies to Clausewitz, the fiction of war) or to illusions that were particular to this venture. Why has the war gone so wrong?

Cobra II is the most serious attempt so far to answer this question. Its authors—Michael Gordon, the chief military correspondent of *The New York Times*, and retired Marine Lieutenant-General Bernard Trainor, a distinguished military intellectual in what, contrary to stereotype, is now the most creative and intellectually rigorous branch of the Armed Services—enjoyed unparalleled access to the officers who planned and executed the Iraq war. Even more impor-

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tantly, they have seen the (still classified) transcripts of interrogations that the U.S. military conducted with the senior Iraqi military and political leadership. The Iraqi perspective is crucial. One of the most costly failures of the coverage of the campaign to overthrow Saddam Hussein and of the subsequent three years of insurgency has been that no reporters have been "embedded" with the insurgents or even the various Shiite factions. And although Gordon and Trainor have had to rely for their account of the Iraqi perspective on those views as refracted through the understanding of American interrogators, there seems little reason to doubt what they report.

The gist of it is that not only was Saddam Hussein as dumb as a rock, but, at least where the United States was concerned, he was mad as a hatter. It is not that he lacked shrewdness. (What long-reigning tyrant does?) But in Saddam's case, his cunning seemed to extend only to Iran, the state immediately outside his borders, and to the ever-present specter of revolt among the Shia and Kurds or from within the Baath Party itself. His strategic focus was pathologically narrow. Despite his defeat in 1991, and more than a decade of sanctions, and the frequent bombardment of his forces by American and British aircraft, Saddam seems to have assumed almost to the end that in the less-than-likely event of an American invasion, Iraq would prevail. As Gordon and Trainor describe it, he was more worried about a reprise of the Shia uprising of 1991 than about the fall of Baghdad to U.S. forces. They quote the director of Iraqi military intelligence telling American interrogators that Saddam and his inner circle believed that "there would be a few air strikes and maybe some operations in the south, then it would be over." According to Tariq Aziz, Saddam's deputy prime minister, "a few weeks before the attacks Saddam still thought the U.S. would not use ground forces."

The Iraqi dictator's mixture of myopia and self-regard was fueled by the extent to which he had thoroughly cowed his own general staff. Comparisons with Hitler are almost uniformly invidious, but an exception can plausibly be made in this case, because Saddam's generals lied to him about the actual military situation on the battlefield as American forces advanced toward Baghdad rather in the way that Hitler's generals were unable—more precisely, afraid—to tell him the truth about the unstoppable advance of the Red Army toward Berlin. Obviously, neither the Germans nor the Iraqis stood any chance of prevailing, but in both cases the dead hand of terror that Hitler and Saddam exercised over their military commanders sealed their fate. In the words of Raad Majid al-Hamdani, the Second Republican Guard corps commander and one of Iraq's most competent generals, Saddam's plan for the defense of Baghdad "was full of bad assumptions and lacked any basis in facts." And, al-Hamdani added, Iraqi commanders "were afraid to speak clearly."

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THE WEAKNESS OF OUR ADVERSARIES makes a good deal of *Cobra II* read somewhat curiously. The book is an amalgam, combining a detailed you-are-there narrative of the military campaign with an analysis of the failures of the American plan that facilitated the subsequent insurgency. It is part yarn, part polemic. Both aspects are brilliantly done, but they never really mesh. The problem, I think, is that there is something dissonant and disturbing about the yarn. I do not mean that there are inaccuracies or falsehoods here. Gordon and Trainor establish beyond a doubt the incompetence and the hopelessness of the Iraqi forces, and they evoke with great conviction the dash and the creativity of American officers and enlisted personnel (their criticism is largely reserved for senior generals and civilian officials at the Pentagon). The implausibility of their story is owed, rather, to a fundamental defect in the military plot: our forces were not exactly fighting the Wehrmacht or the Red Army as they advanced toward Baghdad. General David McKiernan, who devised Operation Cobra II (the battle plan for the campaign), chose the name because it evoked Operation Cobra, General Patton's plan for the liberation of France in 1944; but this was a grandiose bit of title inflation.

Was Operation Cobra II bravely and ably executed, regardless of the strategic errors that Gordon and Trainor identify? Absolutely. But in a time when it is acceptable to criticize the Bush administration's handling of the war but somehow illicit to say anything negative about the uniformed military, one must ask whether a victory against so woebegone a foe is really cause for such self-congratulation. After all, there was never any question of the Iraqis defeating us.

In the more sober and analytical parts of their book, Gordon and Trainor tacitly concede the point, above all by emphasizing in heretofore unknown detail that the real challenge facing American planners—a challenge that they show the Pentagon largely bungled—was how to secure a lasting victory, or, to use the military term of art, the "desired end state." That end state was not, of course, only a military one. But Gordon and Trainor remain imprisoned in an almost exclusively military analysis of what went wrong. Had there been more troops, better planning, a senior staff that could have stood up to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and so on, things in Iraq might not have gone so badly wrong. This may well be true. But a purely military approach unintentionally underplays the essential problem in Iraq—the problem of politics.

GORDON AND TRAINOR'S FUNDAMENTAL contention is that had the Pentagon committed more forces from the outset, and taken more seriously the so-called post-conflict security and stabilization operations, and not begun planning for a draw-down of American forces before the campaign had even gotten under way, then the insurgency, while probably inevitable, would in all likelihood not have become nearly so virulent. Having interviewed most of them, Gordon and Trainor argue that "the U.S. military commanders who battled their way to Baghdad and endured the long, hot summer of 2003 believe that there was a window of opportunity in the early weeks and months of the invasion, which was allowed to close. Though some degree of opposition was unavoidable, the virulent insurgency that followed was not inevitable but was aided by military and political blunders in Washington."

The Bush administration and its defenders often rebut criticism of the conduct of the war in Iraq by saying that the press and the critics of the policy show a lack of historical understanding. As one official at the Pentagon put it to me in 2004, if the current press system had existed in 1942 and 1943, when U.S. forces were floundering in North Africa, "Eisenhower would have been lucky to have

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gotten a training command in North Dakota" and "George Marshall would have been lucky to have survived." He said this at a time when Rumsfeld was still denying there was an insurgency at all, insisting that the enemies of post-Saddam Iraq were only a few Baathist dead-enders and foreign terrorists—so, by current Pentagon standards, I suppose it constituted an admission of sorts.

SUCH APOLOGIAS DO NOT SURVIVE either the scrutiny Gordon and Trainor bring to bear or the testimony from senior leaders in the Pentagon who were willing, often for the first time, to describe to them in great detail how awfully things went wrong, from the initial planning stages on. The institutional power play that put responsibility not just for the military campaign itself but also for postwar Iraq in the hands of the Pentagon is well known by now. What has been less remarked upon, but on which Gordon and Trainor rightly put a great deal of emphasis, was Rumsfeld's determination not to commit to "nation-building" in postwar Iraq. In a speech in New York on February 14, 2003, less than two months before the commencement of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Rumsfeld gave a speech called "Beyond Nation-Building." In it, he offered the Balkans not as a model of how to intervene, but as a paradigm for an intervention gone wrong. The prolonged presence of American and other NATO peacekeepers in Kosovo, he declared, had created a "culture of dependency." Were the United States to invade Iraq, Rumsfeld said (the Bush administration was even then continuing the pretense that the decision to go to war had not yet been made), America would instead help Iraqis rebuild their country for themselves. As Gordon and Trainor put it, Rumsfeld was presenting a vision of a post-Saddam Iraq that would be virtually cost-free to the United States once the shooting had stopped. America could "oust a dictator, usher in a new era in Iraq, shift the balance of power in the Middle East in the United States's favor, all without America's committing itself to the lengthy, costly, and arduous peacekeeping and nation-building, which the Clinton administration had undertaken in Bosnia and Kosovo."

That the Bush administration was convinced that the war in Iraq was going to be cheap is well documented. Whether it was Paul Wolfowitz testifying before Congress that Iraqi oil revenues would almost certainly pay for the country's reconstruction, or Rumsfeld answering with an indignant "Baloney" George Stephanopoulos's query about whether a $300 billion price tag on the war might not be closer to the mark than the $50 or $60 billion the administration was forecasting, examples are legion of the Bush administration's refusal to budge from its most optimistic scenarios for postwar Iraq. Gordon and Trainor document the same cult of the best-case scenario at the operational level: during the run-up to the war, military planners who thought that more troops would be needed for occupation duties were told no, and that forces from other countries would take care of this, and that American forces would be substantially reduced within a few months of Saddam's fall. The planners were told to make plans for these draw-downs even as planning for the war itself was still going on.

DESPITE ITS FAILURE TO PUT together a real coalition to invade Iraq, as President George H. W. Bush had done before the Gulf War of 1991, the Bush administration appears to have launched the war convinced that once Saddam Hussein had been removed, security in a postwar Iraq would be largely guaranteed by existing Iraqi police and military formations denuded of their Baathist senior commanders and buttressed, where necessary, by foreign constabulary forces from Italy, Denmark, Portugal, South Korea, Singapore, and elsewhere. As Gordon and Trainor note, "There was no fallback plan." They describe an administration impervious to the possibility of things going wrong once the initial military mission had been "accomplished," to use George W. Bush's unfortunate word when he addressed the nation from that aircraft carrier on April 26, 2003. "Few of the potential contributors [to this constabulary force]," they write, "had been wholehearted supporters of the war, but the administration assumed they would be willing to help keep peace in a relatively benign Iraq, which controlled some of the world's largest oil reserves and which would be ruled by a new enlightened government."

But when things did not go according to plan, the Bush administration failed to

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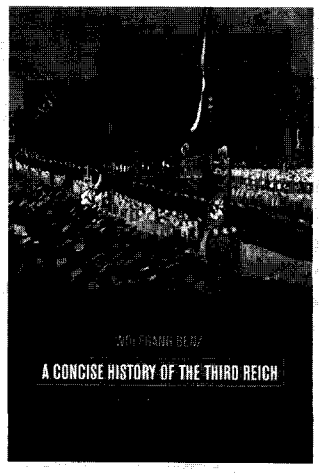

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reconsider its postwar strategy. As Gordon and Trainor put it, President Bush and his team "failed to adapt to developments on the ground and remained wedded to their prewar analysis of Iraq even after Iraqis showed their penchant for guerrilla tactics in the first days of the war." This point is significant. Gordon and Trainor believe that the irregular Iraqi forces known collectively as the Fedayeen Saddam constituted the embryonic form of the subsequent insurgency. And they add that "the first Marine to be killed in action [in the war] died at the hands of an Iraqi dressed in civilian clothes who fired from a pickup truck, not a tank."

Gordon and Trainor argue that American troops on the ground understood that the nature of their enemy was different from the one anticipated in the war plan. But Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks, they write, remained unconvinced, and adamantly refused to adjust their plan significantly. Instead they continued to believe that "their victory would be sealed with the seizure of Baghdad, which was identified as Iraq's 'center of gravity.'" They never seem to have understood that "from the first day of the invasion the United States was not fighting a purely conventional war, one that would suddenly be brought to an end when the regime's ministries were seized and its leader toppled." Instead, victory depended on bringing the Sunni regions of Iraq and the population centers of Iraq, above all Baghdad itself, under control. But Gordon and Trainor demonstrate conclusively that, given the administration's pre-existing convictions about what a post-Saddam Iraq would look like, and Rumsfeld's dogmatic insistence that large numbers of American troops would not be needed in Iraq after Baghdad fell, there was never any real thought given to altering the pre-existing strategy. Perhaps the most depressing of all Gordon and Trainor's depressing observations is that "Rumsfeld and his aides viewed the building of a new Iraq as a relatively undemanding pursuit."

GORDON AND TRAINOR SEEM to have decided not to pursue in depth the question of why this was the case. There is little mention in the book of the influence of Iraqi exiles such as Ahmed Chalabi on the administration's thinking. Instead, they focus on military mistakes and on the disjunction between what they call "the bold and extraordinarily ambitious" political goals of the war and the quality of the actual planning. For Gordon and Trainor, five errors stand out—the failure to understand the question of tribalism in Iraq; the overuse of technology in warfighting; the failure to adapt to changing conditions on the ground; the failure to listen to different (and more pessimistic) military and political perspectives; and the failure to take into account the lessons of nation-building in the Balkans between 1995 and 2002.

We may never know much more about what went wrong in Iraq than what is to be found in the pages of this volume. The memoirs of today's politicians tend to be as shifty and obscure as the press conferences they give while in office. But the problem is far deeper than loyalty to the president, or careerism, or staying on message. In Washington these days, it is customary to speak of someone who rigidly follows the Bush administration party line as having "swallowed the Kool-Aid." It is not a very accurate way of grasping the realities of presidential policy-making—except with regard to Iraq. Even today, it often seems as if the reality in Iraq has not yet sunk in. There is much talk about how American tactics and patience, so misrepresented by the mainstream media, are finally paying off and the Iraqi army is being "stood up," as they say in the military English in which Bush increasingly tries to take refuge. And administration officials continue to insist that, taken as a whole, the news from Iraq is good. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Peter Pace, recently declared that on balance, and despite some setbacks, things were going "very, very well."

THIS IS EITHER SELF-deception or the deception of others. Judging from Gordon and Trainor's account, self-deception seems the likelier explanation. Then as now, the belief that we were winning was more theological than empirical. From my own experience, during the period when I was going back and forth to and from Iraq in 2003 and 2004, administration officials still broadly believed that they were winning and felt genuinely aggrieved that, unlike our colleagues from Fox News, upon whom the military and the Coalition Provisional Authority increasingly relied, we in the "mainstream media" could not accept the fact that, on balance, the news from Iraq was more good than bad. It is a view that persists to this day.

The question is why. Gordon and Trainor offer no opinion on the subject, but in my view it is probably unfair to focus exclusively, as they do, on the neoconservatives, or even on the Bush administration as a whole. Rumsfeld, after all, is about as far from being a believer in democracy-building as it is possible to be—a major reason why he always emphasized to military commandeers his preference for strategies that would allow U.S. forces to withdraw quickly. More broadly, the Iraq mess cannot be separated from the problematic question of America's official ideology. I do not mean capitalism or Christianity. I mean optimism.

The problem of optimism lies at the heart of what went wrong both in the planning stages for the war and subsequently on the ground in Iraq. Recently,

Still Lifes

After Two Paintings by Richard Baker

Taking their final breath, the tulips strain
against blue glass, against a window pane,
like glowing Tussaud ladies. The pink heads twist.
The whole arrangement almost levitates
except where fading leaves curl, darkening
the edges like the lips of half-burned candles.

Light shifts across the room. This palette handles
bouquets of mackerel tossed on shallow plates,
mouths open, hopeful, a foliage of tails,
dead, glassy eyes, the crenulated scales.
These fish are solid stuff, no pointillist
illusion, no "Table with Food." The silver hardens.

Behind the house, the alley, city gardens,
a frieze of clouds. A hundred windows frame
a hundred insides looking out, the dry
collage of bricks, fire escapes shadowing
bare branches pointed skyward with the same
strained prayerful attitude against the sky.

LYNN CHANDHOK

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the U.S. Army journal *Military Review* published an essay by Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, a British officer who had served in Iraq alongside U.S. forces. His criticism was sharp, and for the most part it concerned strictly military matters. But he, too, came back again and again to this question of what he called "damaging optimism"—the refusal of American commanders to accept the possibility that things might go wrong. And lest this seem simply like the usual British sour grapes about America (Greece to their Rome and all that jazz), the worry about overly optimistic thinking is one of the key recommendations of a recent Department of Defense study cautioning that the tendency of U.S. officers to take their wishes for reality has created huge problems for the American effort in Iraq.

Aylwin-Foster wrote that "self-belief and resilient optimism are recognized necessities for successful command, and all professional forces strive for a strong can-do ethos. However, it is unhelpful if it discourages junior commandeers from reporting unwelcome news up the chain of command. Force commanders and political masters need to know the true state of affairs if they are to reach timely decisions to change plans: arguably, they [the Americans] did not always do so." In a somewhat more discreet echo of Gordon and Trainor's blunt talk about "the dysfunction of American military structures," Aylwin-Foster described the American military establishment in Iraq as seeming to be "weighted down by bureaucracy, a stiflingly hierarchical outlook, a predisposition to offensive operations, and a sense that duty required all issues to be confronted head-on." In other words, a military admirably configured to mount a lightning campaign against an inferior foe, but not a military (let alone a political leadership!) prepared to fight a prolonged semi-guerrilla war, particularly in a context of mounting sectarian violence in which the United States can obviously take no side.

But even today it often seems as if this lesson has not yet sunk in. Though the U.S. military does understand that the solution to the Iraqi quagmire is principally political, neither they nor their civilian leaders have any real idea of what that political solution might look like. Perhaps this is why, increasingly, those who still defend the war do so in default terms, arguing that the United States has to stay in Iraq because otherwise we will have granted a victory to the terrorists. This is eleventh-hour talk, the language of damage limitation. We have to stay because we cannot go. At best, the old Scottish verdict "Not Proven" might be invoked here.

IT IS A COMMONPLACE THAT WARS always surprise, and that hindsight is 20/20, and so on. But Iraq was never the mystery that administration apologists and other supporters of the war now insist that it was. To the contrary, what Saddam wrought in almost thirty years of rule was abundantly clear to anyone who cared to look. He had destroyed the communists and long ago sent the liberals into exile—so much so that they did not recognize Iraq when they returned; so much so that, with the exception of some exemplary figures such as Kanan Makiya, who has largely fled politics, many have left again. The exiles were away too long. And what was left in this increasingly pious and retribalized Iraq? Sciri, the Dawa Party: in other words, the groups that have captured the overwhelming majority of the majority Shia vote; the former protégés of Tehran. Did one have to be the second coming of Clausewitz to figure this out? No, one simply had to be willing to examine some preconceived notions.

These realities are obviously not the subject of this splendid book, nor should they have been. But without this larger historical and political context, and without any explanation of why Bush and his team were so sanguine about postwar Iraq, the book sometimes can read like a joke without a punch line. The distinguished Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld was doubtless being hyperbolic when he argued last year that the invasion of Iraq was "the most foolish war since Emperor Augustus in 9 B.C. sent his legions into Germany and lost them," but he, like most critics of the war and the postwar, is only an informed outsider. Gordon and Trainor are insiders. With *Cobra II*, they have performed an invaluable service by cutting through the nonsense that the Bush administration and its echo chamber on Fox, the columns of the *New York Post*, and blogs such as Powerline and Hugh Hewitt continue to peddle about Iraq.

But those wanting a more vivid and credible sense of what is taking place in Iraq today might heed the blogger Zeyad, a Baghdadi dentist who welcomed the American overthrow of Saddam, and whose blog, Healing Iraq, was once one of the preferred sources for many boosterish conservative bloggers in the United States. Here is how Zeyad describes Baghdad today:

> Please don't ask me whether I believe Iraq is on the verge of civil war yet or not. I have never experienced a civil war before, only regular ones. All I see is that both sides are engaged in tit-for-tat lynchings and summary executions. I see governmental forces openly taking sides or stepping aside. I see an occupation force that is clueless about what is going on in the country. I see politicians that distrust each other and continue to flame the situation for their own personal interests. I see Islamic clerics delivering fiery sermons against each other, then smile and hug each other at the end of the day in staged PR stunts. I see the country breaking into pieces. The frontlines between different districts of Baghdad are already clearly demarked and ready for the battle. I was stopped in my own neighbourhood yesterday by a watch team and questioned where I live and what I was doing in that area. I see other people curiously staring in each other's faces on the street. I see hundreds of people disappearing in the middle of the night and their corpses surfacing next day with electric drill holes in them. I see people blown up to smithereens because a brainwashed virgin seeker targeted a crowded market or café. I see all that and more.
>
> Don't you dare chastise me for what I write about my country.

On the home page of Healing Iraq, there is an epigraph from Swift: "It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of what he was never reasoned into." Gordon and Trainor establish in extraordinary detail that the same could be said about the Bush administration. Throughout military history, from Alcibiades's Sicilian expedition to the "bridge too far" at Arnhem in World War II, nations and individuals have paid a terrible price for the decisions of commanders in whom daring and determination were married to delusion, self-regard, and a fatal disrespect for their adversaries. Whatever the outcome in Iraq, Gordon and Trainor have definitively entered Operation Iraqi Freedom on that sorry roster. ■

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David A. Bell

When Terror Was Young

THE TERROR:
THE MERCILESS WAR FOR FREEDOM
IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE
By David Andress
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 441 pp., $26)

BEFORE "GLOBAL TERRORISM" and the "war on terrorism," there was the Terror: the radical climax of the French Revolution, set to the grisly music of the guillotine. Its architects and executioners were the first people widely called "terrorists," and the first to be widely known for embracing fear as their principal political weapon. For nearly two centuries, their actions stained the political imagination of the West as little else has.

That this stain has almost entirely faded since the end of the cold war is demonstrated by David Andress's unconvincing attempts, in the final pages of his history of the Terror, to give his subject a contemporary relevance. He does so by linking it not to what we now call terrorism, but to counter-terrorism: "the continuing unchecked spread of the security state," and the fact that "of course, choice in politics is confined to a narrowing spectrum of appropriately 'patriotic' viewpoints" (that "of course" is a nice touch). Even if you share Andress's politics, you should still find this comparison strained. The original Terror took place in the context of a vastly ambitious and vastly unstable revolution that involved multiple bouts of civil war and murderous ideological quarrels among former allies. The Bush and Blair administrations (Andress is British), no matter how sinister you might think them, emphatically do not fit this mold.

But any comparison with modern terrorism would be equally labored, despite the resonant coincidence of terminology. Terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda have a number of clear antecedents stretching back to the medieval "assassins," and also including, ironically, partisan groups that sprang up across Europe to resist French revolutionary and Napoleonic armies. The French "terrorists" of 1793–1794 do not belong in this company, and what they share with their twenty-first-century namesakes they have in common also with a wide range of violent extremists. It is time to conclude that, with the demise of modern revolutionary politics over the past generation, the Terror simply no longer belongs to that part of the historical record which seems to speak directly and vitally to our contemporary experience.

YET A DIMINISHED CONTEMporary relevance says nothing about a subject's interest and power, and the Terror remains absolutely mesmerizing on many levels. It offers a parable of the darkest and most depressing sort: of a revolution that began with the most wonderfully utopian hopes and plans, articulated by some of the best educated and most eloquent political leaders in history, but crashed, within the space of four years, into a fiery chaos of hatred, destruction, and murder. It is a story of some of history's most memorable political personalities: the brash, brilliant, corrupt orator Georges Danton, who told his executioner, "Don't forget to show my head to the people, it's worth seeing"; Louis-Antoine Saint-Just, the troubled adolescent author of sadomasochistic pornography turned stern archangel of the Committee of Public Safety (the novelist Barrès called him a "lamp in a tomb"); Jean-Paul Marat, the Swiss doctor and longtime political crank turned raging prophet of death and revolutionary martyr; and above all, the cool, precise, perfectly attired "Incorruptible" Maximilien Robespierre. And the Terror saw France recover from a disastrous military situation and emerge as the undisputed master of western Europe, paving the way for Napoleon and more than two more decades of merciless war.

Unfortunately, when it comes to the Terror, historians have apparently served the general reading public very badly. They have written hundreds of general histories of the French Revolution, and untold thousands of monographs on specific aspects of the Terror, but very few overviews of the Terror itself. Even in France, those who take on the subject tend to do so in the form of difficult analytical essays, inaccessible to anyone but specialists (and, sometimes, to them too).

But there is a reason for this neglect. Historians who deplore the French Revolution have generally tried to make the borders of the Terror seem so broad that it becomes indistinguishable from the Revolution itself. François Furet, the pre-eminent historian of the subject until his death in 1997, claimed to find significant intimations of the Terror as early as the spring of 1789, before the fall of the Bastille and a full three years before the fall of the French monarchy. Those who still defend the Revolution, meanwhile, have generally put the Terror in a different but equally broad context: that of widespread civil war, for which grasping counter-revolutionaries allegedly bear much of the responsibility, particularly in the multiple "White Terrors" that erupted throughout much of the country during and after the more famous "Red Terror."

Either way, the Terror dissolves into a larger whole. And despite the Terror's diminishing contemporary relevance, the burden of the past and its partisanships has naturally proved far harder to shake in the little world of academia. In France, a distressing proportion of professional historians of the Revolution still refuse even to acknowledge the existence of colleagues from the opposing ideological camp. They glare defiantly over their moldering conceptual barricades like the marooned Japanese soldiers who continued to fight World War II into the 1970s.

IT IS NOT SURPRISING, THEN, THAT Andress's book is the first full-length study of the Terror, as a discrete phenomenon, to appear in many years (and the first serious one in English since R.R. Palmer's *Twelve Who Ruled* in 1941, which is still delightfully, zestfully readable). But despite the multiple challenges and the unfortunate conclusion, Andress has done a remarkably good job. He provides a brisk background, and then marches vigorously through events from the summer of 1792 to the summer of 1794: from the fall of the French monarchy to the fall of Robespierre and Saint-Just on the day that the new Republican calendar called the Ninth of Thermidor. He writes clearly and authoritatively, draws deftly on recent scholarship, and provides a sure

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guide through some of the most compressed and tangled political undergrowth in history.

Andress does not offer a radically new interpretation, and so he cannot avoid choosing, to a certain extent, between the old ideological ones. Predictably enough, he mostly opts for the left. "The Terror," he writes by way of definition, "was above all the consequence in real civil war of a failure of consensus that had edged steadily closer to complete collapse for over three years." He adds, at the end of the same paragraph: "In resorting to Terror, the revolutionaries preserved their country ... and went on to forge a military power that was to dominate Europe for twenty years." The fact that elsewhere Andress deplores Napoleon Bonaparte as a butcher and laments the gargantuan destruction that these twenty years wrought might suggest that he does not actually view this "preservation" as an unqualified good thing (and quite rightly, too). But in this passage he is singing the "Marseillaise" and echoing the justification first given by the Terrorists themselves: *salus populi suprema lex*.

Still, his narrative mostly avoids dogmatism. He resists the habit, so frequent among earlier generations of historians, of exclaiming indignantly at the obvious guilt of this or that figure. He avoids attributing motives to class origins, as some French historians still do. And he gives at least some attention to the way political language does not just reflect political struggles, but helps actively to shape them.

THIS IS THE CENTRAL POINT that Furet made some twenty-eight years ago in his classic work *Interpreting the French Revolution*, which still looms over the field. Although Furet essentially equated the Terror with the Revolution (a position he later regretted), he did not do it out of sheer dislike or incensed moral judgment. Rather, he argued that the collapse of the Old Regime in 1787–1789 created a vacuum of power, which the revolutionaries rushed to fill with words. Unfortunately, the legacies of French absolutism, with its tremendously tight centralization of power, and of late Enlightenment political philosophy, heavily influenced by Rousseau, made it impossible for the French to think in terms of divided sovereignty, and therefore of effective checks and balances within government. Instead, the revolutionaries replaced their absolute King with the fiction of an absolute People, which created the dilemma of how such an allegedly indivisible thing might be represented in practice.

What followed, between 1789 and 1794, was five years of ferocious competition, as various factions struggled to pose as the most pure, most virtuous, most authentic embodiment of the People. This ever-accelerating whirl of struggle turned increasingly violent, until finally centripetal forces tore the entire mechanism apart in the ghastly crash of the Ninth of Thermidor. Furet's work had a seductive effect, less on the traditional French right than on centrists and classical liberals, who saw in it an explanation of why, even at the end of the twentieth century, France remained in thrall to an archaic, centralized system of government that systematically played down private initiative. It also proved enormously suggestive to those influenced by various currents of 1970s philosophy, with their emphasis on "discourse" and the "prison-house of language." It therefore inspired a profitable generation's worth of work on the Revolution's "political culture," on which Andress has very profitably drawn.

Unfortunately, Furet did ignore the very real effects of civil war and conspiracy. "The Revolution," he wrote blithely, "invented formidable enemies for itself, for every Manichean creed needs to overcome its share of eternal evil." To hold anything else, he added, was to endorse a thesis of "circumstances" (the ones that forced the Revolution to respond repressively), and therefore to place the blame for the Terror on the Revolution's enemies. This was an unjustified leap by Furet, to say the least. The existence of real, massive threats may help to explain why a regime turns to repressive measures or worse, but it hardly justifies them. Did the presence of Nazi saboteurs in the Soviet Union justify the gulag? It would have been entirely possible to argue that the existence of violent opposition fed into the rhetorical spiral that Furet had delineated and encouraged it until the revolutionaries could no longer tell real enemies from phantoms, and conspiracies from their own feverish nightmares; but instead in Furet's work the dogmatism all too often associated with the subject prevailed. He dismissed the Counter-Revolution, thereby allowing the traditional left to dismiss *him* more or less wholesale.

ANDRESS, FORTUNATELY, DOES not reject Furet's insights completely. Yet he does start with the greatest and most dramatic conspiracy of all: Louis XVI's flight to Varennes in June of 1791, when he and his royal family stole out of the Tuileries Palace in the middle of the night and headed for the frontier in a heavy carriage, only to be stopped and arrested in the small town of Varennes and sent back to the capital as virtual prisoners. The evidence proves that Louis intended to overturn by force the constitutional monarchy that he had explicitly accepted, and to reverse the massive social and political changes under way since 1789. The news of the flight had a crushingly traumatic effect on French public opinion—the sort experienced in the United States with the Lincoln and Kennedy assassinations, or Pearl Harbor, or on September 11. It gave the unstable political competition already under way a far harsher cast. It made the paranoid ravings emanating from men such as Marat seem far more plausible, and it made revolutionaries of all political stripes far more willing to accept the need for drastic measures. Andress makes this case convincingly and well.

The first great effusion of blood, though, was yet to come. Indeed, despite a basso continuo of rural unrest, several large urban skirmishes, and some nasty encounters between revolutionaries and the old royal army, the death toll for the entire revolutionary period before the summer of 1792 probably fell in the low four figures—a tiny percentage of what would follow between 1792 and 1794. What triggered the change, even more than the flight to Varennes, was the fact that France declared war on Austria and Prussia in April 1792, making conspiracy and treason far more a matter of life or

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death. The most predictable early casualty of the war was the monarchy, its foundations reduced to gravel after the flight to Varennes, and kept standing only through some exceptionally rickety political deals, which could not come close to enduring the pressure of early French defeats. On August 10, 1792, organized detachments of revolutionary militants (the famous *sans-culottes* and *fédérés*) stormed the Tuileries, leaving hundreds dead and effectively ending a political institution some eight hundred years old.

Worse was to come, however. In the first days of September, news reached Paris that the great eastern fortress of Longwy had fallen to the duke of Brunswick, with that of Verdun likely to follow, and nothing but an open road left between the duke's Prussian Army and Paris. Groups of *sans-culottes* stormed prisons holding suspected counter-revolutionaries and started to slaughter the inmates. As many as fifteen hundred men and women died. Gruesome stories circulated throughout Europe of *sans-culottes* dragging headless naked bodies through the streets, sexually mutilating female aristocrats, and literally drinking the blood of their helpless victims. The stories quickly convinced much of educated European opinion that the French Revolution had released some dark spirit of barbarism from the depths, and that nothing less than total war was necessary to quell it.

Andress's chapter on the "September Massacres" does not show him at his best. In general, he follows the line laid down in 1935 by Pierre Caron, a meticulous but unmistakably partisan French historian who carefully investigated all the extant records and testimonies and found, not surprisingly, that few of the wild stories about the massacres had a basis in fact. Caron emphasized that the *sans-culottes* did not kill randomly, but established a ghastly simulacrum of judicial procedure meant to demonstrate the new fact of popular sovereignty. Prisoners were given a hearing—some for as little as a few minutes—and many of them in fact walked free. Prisoners and perpetrators alike bore witness to the weirdly methodical and pragmatic atmosphere of the massacres (the *sans-culottes* decided to club or to stab victims to death, for instance, so as to save scarce gunpowder). The massacres "were not a simple mob attack," Andress echoes. "It was all rather orderly." Well, yes, from one point of view. But the main purpose of describing the episode should not be to debunk 214-year-old rumors any more than to condemn the *sans-culottes* as savages, but to understand how such hideous killings came about in the first place, and why the civil authorities did so little to stop them.

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ANDRESS DOES CONSIDERABLY better in the remainder of the book, covering all the great set pieces of the Terror with aplomb. There is the great conflict within the new National Convention between radical factions: the "Mountain" (dominated by Robespierre), which allied for a time with the *sans-culottes*, and the "Gironde," which sought with increasing desperation to slow the revolution and to limit the influence of Parisian militants. "Paris will be annihilated, and men will search the banks of the Seine for traces of the city," proclaimed the Girondin orator Isnard. There is the fatal moment in the late spring of 1793 when the *sans-culottes* invaded the convention and forced the expulsion of the Girondin deputies. "Tell your fucking president that he and his Assembly are fucked, and that if within one hour he doesn't deliver to me the Twenty-two I'm going to blast it": such were the words, uttered by the *sans-culotte* commander Hanriot, cannon literally in hand, by which France's fledgling democracy died.

Then there are the horrific massacres (including prisoners blasted apart by cannon) that followed the "pacification" of Lyon, which had risen after the Girondins' purge. There is the vicious civil war centered on the western region of the Vendée, and the tactics of mass homicide practiced there by the "hell columns" of General Turreau (whose name remains proudly inscribed on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris). Andress does not flinch from citing the most reliable estimate of the death toll in the region: 250,000, half from disease and half from deliberate killing. There is the trial and execution of Danton. There is the bizarre ritual of the Feast of the Supreme Being, at which Robespierre, wearing a garish blue robe, descended from a wood-and-papier-mâché mountain like an Old Testament prophet, convincing many onlookers of his fall into megalomania. Finally, of course, there is the collapse of the Ninth of Thermidor—July 27, 1794—when deputies fearful of following Danton to the guillotine finally toppled and killed Robespierre and his allies.

But Andress does not just tell colorful stories. He also carefully traces the construction of the legal mechanisms of the Terror, which made it easier and easier to send "suspects" to the guillotine with only a parody of due process, and so encouraged private grudges and resentments to play themselves out in the public sphere with fatal results. He follows the development of key institutions, especially the fearsome Revolutionary Tribunal. And he shows how the members of the National Convention found it impossible to put into effect the idealistic, egalitarian constitution they had designed, instead retaining sovereign power for themselves, or delegating it to dictatorial "representatives on mission" in the provinces, and to the famous twelve-member Committee of Public Safety.

THE MOST INTERESTING PART of the book comes just after Andress has cleared the smoke and blood of the September Massacres offstage, and is preparing for the remaining acts. In a number of short but exceptionally cogent pages, he sketches out several themes from French political culture in the eighteenth century and shows how they contributed to the formation of a "terrorist" mentality. He first suggests that the decline in the belief in divine providence that accompanied the Enlightenment helped lead to an exaggerated, even conspiratorial view of human agency, at least among the intellectual elites. Now unfortunate events had to be blamed on someone's deliberate acts, rather than on accident or unforeseen consequence. Andress also looks at the belief in indivisible sovereignty and how it helped eliminate the possibility of legitimate political disagreement (in the face of such sovereignty there could be no permanent "loyal opposition," only faction and conspiracy). These observations owe a great deal to the rediscovery of "political culture" that followed the work of Furet.

And then Andress raises a particularly stimulating point. "Strange as it may seem to a modern reader," he begins, "many educated people in eighteenth-

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century France believed that a frankly melodramatic acting-out of emotional experiences was 'authentic' and the mark of an honest and virtuous character." Not so strange perhaps to readers familiar with the literature of the period, but historians (with the prominent exception of the literary historian Jean Starobinski) have only begun to explore the cultural and political consequences. This "sentimentalism," Andress suggests, led educated men and women to prize emotional honesty over all else, to seek a person's true political "self" in the effusions of his heart rather than in any declaration of principle, to believe that a "union of hearts" could overcome the deepest political divisions, and to have a profound, phobic suspicion that the most virtuous-seeming exterior could mask a festering core of evil. The longing for "transparency" fed political paranoia and made political disagreement an object of horror.

These are the sorts of insights that turn late eighteenth-century France into an intriguingly bizarre and exotic place: not the "fount of modernity" that is so familiar to us (and which in many respects it undoubtedly was), but a country whose denizens vibrated to an intensely idiosyncratic cultural music that did not last long beyond the end of the eighteenth century. It is not the sort of country best explored with the skills of the forensic pathologist, and still less those of the criminal prosecutor or defense attorney. It requires a cultural anthropologist of the past. Unfortunately, Andress mostly chooses not to approach his subject in this guise. Having formulated his insights, he then returns to his conventional narrative, with its numerous annoying lapses into a brief for the defense. It is perhaps too much to ask for a book both to tell the story of the Terror well and also to formulate an original approach to it. Simply assimilating the prodigious primary and secondary literature is a Sisyphean task. Doing so and then distilling it into a cogent narrative largely free of dogmatism (if not of partisanship), as Andress does, is no mean achievement, and a reason for applause.

It really is time, though, for someone to write a history of the Terror that resists the temptation to see Robespierre and Saint-Just as harbingers of modern politics, whether as incarnated by Lenin, or Ho Chi Minh, or George W. Bush and the Patriot Act. Perhaps these revolutionaries are best seen instead as representatives of a strange, hybrid cultural moment that could speak in the now-familiar languages of constitutionalism and the rights of man, but that held, by our standards, very odd ideas about what mankind was. In a culture in which educated men and women believed fervently in perfect unions of minds (and hearts!), how could enthusiasm be generated for the sort of painful, frustrating compromises that every real constitution represents? In a culture that put such huge stress on knowing the secrets of the heart, how much faith could be put in the slow, grinding mechanisms of ordinary criminal procedure, particularly in moments of crisis? And in a culture where sentiments were classified into one of two rigid categories, virtuous or corrupt, how could a government fighting for its life resist the desire to scourge every last trace of evil thinking with fire and iron? A history book that tells the story of the Terror from this perspective would be interesting indeed (and the author might also confront the problem of why America's revolutionaries, despite coming from a very similar culture and also engaging heavily in repressive violence, ultimately followed a very different path). It would be a way of moving the extraordinary historical episode that was the Terror back out of a too-familiar modernity and into a tantalizingly peculiar past. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

So far as I know, every organization representing an ethnic group—whether it has been black, Jewish, Catholic, or Latino—has always been headed by someone from the group. The fact is that Jack had been my assistant, as Driver notes, and, as Driver also acknowledges, I had been engaged at the leadership level in all the major civil rights cases of my era. For whatever reason, Marshall did not want me to succeed him. But there were many experienced black attorneys who played leadership roles in the civil rights struggle—such as Loren Miller, William Robert Ming, James Nabrit, Oliver Hill, Spotswood Robinson, and, of course, Constance Motley. Underlying Driver's attack is the notion that a black person, such as myself, should not care deeply about black leadership for black organizations. You don't have to be a black nationalist to insist on this or to demand that this history be fully and accurately told. Greenberg should have recognized the symbolic nature of the job and declined the appointment. Had he done so, he would have joined the ranks of many whites who have made an incalculable and much revered contribution to the struggle for justice and equal rights without reaching for leadership.

ROBERT L. CARTER
Senior Judge
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New York, New York

FALSE WITNESS

In a small item called "Swear Tactics," The New Republic observed that, when Attorney General Alberto Gonzales testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee, he may have lied about the scope of the Bush administration's wiretapping program (Notebook, March 13). The item suggested that, in the future, the committee should require Gonzales to testify under oath. But, by lying—even without having been sworn in—it is possible that Gonzales violated the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct. Members of the bar in Texas, which granted Gonzales his license to practice law, must always have their conduct conform with these rules—that is, once a lawyer, always a lawyer (unless one ceases to be a member of the bar). The same is the case in Washington, D.C. The relevant Texas rule is 4.01, "Truthfulness in Statements to Others," which says, "In the course of representing a client a lawyer shall not knowingly: (a) make a false statement of material fact or law to a third person; or (b) fail to disclose a material fact to a third person when disclosure is necessary to avoid making the lawyer a party to a criminal act or knowingly assisting a fraudulent act perpetrated by a client."

There is no exception for testimony before Congress or for national security matters. Accordingly, the question is whether Gonzales acted "knowingly" and either "made a false statement" or "failed to disclose a material fact" to the Committee. It is one for the Texas bar to answer and, if indeed the rule was violated, consider censure.

ETHAN S. BURGER
Chevy Chase, Maryland

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Useless

I FEAR THAT I HAVE NOTHING USEful to say about Iraq. I supported the war, so I cannot say nothing; but the course of events in Iraq, which has embarrassed all the certainties of all the commentators, has left me with an anxiety about arrogance. Reality seems to have escaped everybody's concept of it. This has had the perverse consequence of making the argument even more virulent, as writers and other important people toil more strenuously to vindicate their old ideas, or their new ones. A dogmatic blindness to failures and obstacles flatters itself as philosophical or historical constancy ("staying the course"), while an impatience with the difficulties of this grand and wild undertaking calls itself open-minded and empirical ("learning from mistakes"). It is certainly the season of the realists, as if realism is not also complicity with reality and idealists are, all of them, just stupid. The liberals at *The New Yorker* even had kind words for the thoroughly contemptible Brent Scowcroft, whose strategic heartlessness toward the Balkan genocide may suddenly be overlooked because he was skeptical about George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, and never mind that this skepticism was also an expression of his strategic heartlessness, this time toward Iraqis and Kurds. Elsewhere, liberal hawks have become recovering liberal hawks, and conservative hawks have remembered fiscal restraint or *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. As the political climate shifts away from post–September 11 jingoism, and the gooseflesh of "shock and awe" is no more, the distinction between apostasy and opportunism is increasingly blurred. Paul Wolfowitz long ago left the scene of the accident. Among the intellectuals, the question of the future of Iraq, or of the Middle East, has been eclipsed by the question of the future of neoconservatism. Iraq is disintegrating, Iran is on the move, Hamas rules Palestine, Pakistan is one assassination away from nuclear-armed anarchy, Russia is meddling and autocratic, China has America in its pocket—but the big thinkers are exercised about the proper ideological definition of the Islamist threat (if it is fascism, then it is still the fight against Franco) and consumed by a disputation between the doctrine of "realistic Wilsonianism" and the doctrine of "democratic realism." Meanwhile the newspapers teach the futility of definitions and doctrines.

I UNDERSTAND THAT WAR DEMANDS debate, and that it is a citizenly duty to throw oneself into the discussion; but I am a little inclined to shut up. All the polysyllabic slogans and the pet ideas seem spectacularly beside the point. I find no reason to conclude that the war is a success and I find no reason to conclude that the war is a failure. I find reason only to wait and see. We are now in the hands of the Iraqis. More significantly, so is Iraq. Since this is the first time in three decades that Iraq is in the hands of the Iraqis, the present situation is exhilarating; but since there may be no such people as the Iraqis, it is troubling. For in liberated Iraq, the Iraqis have disappeared. They have left in their wake only Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds. This is not surprising. When you emancipate the people of a place, you emancipate the actually existing people of a place. For 30 years, the people in Iraq suppressed their ethnic and religious excitements in a dictatorship. Why would they wish to suppress them in a democracy? I know, I know: because in a democracy they will not have to suppress them, at least not always or everywhere. A large number of Iraqis know this, too. But a large number do not know it, and do not want to know it. They want only what they did not have. We freed them for their particularities. Now we must hope that they discover their generalities.

I DO NOT MEAN TO SOUND SO PASSIVE about the American role. We are the mightiest force in Iraq, and there are pressures for integration that we may exert. (More American troops in more Iraqi towns would be a match for the Sunni insurgency and the Shia death squads, but there will be no more American troops in Iraq in this lifetime. There will be only more enchanted stories about Tal Afar.) Yet military power does not always translate into political power, as our excellent ambassador in Baghdad will attest, now that the interests of Iraqi Shiism and the interests of Iraqi democracy have somewhat diverged; and political power in Iraq belongs to the Iraqis. This was our intention, after all. We could have installed a strongman, and we didn't. So if we intended to free Iraq, we have succeeded. But if we intended to democratize Iraq, we have not yet succeeded. Democracy is not the same thing as freedom. Democracy is a specific arrangement of freedom. And insofar as it is an attempt to exchange one political culture with another, democratization is essentially a policy of *de*stabilization; and therefore it takes time. For this reason, and not only for this reason, the president is right that the United States must remain in Iraq for the duration of the struggle. And he is right that there are many brave people in Iraq who are working to create a fair and open order, and that these people have a deep moral claim upon our help. And he is right that it is not the presence of the United States that is the main cause of the Iraqi semi-chaos: the separatists and the saints are acting, quite obviously, on their own identities. And he is right that a democratic Iraq would be an epochal accomplishment.

BUT BUSH HAS BEEN WRONG ABOUT SO much else. The WMD affair is an outrage of modern American diplomacy. It gave popular cynicism a basis in reality, and it will impair the ability of a future president to use American power against the nuclear arsenal of what an Israeli scholar many years ago called "crazy states." And the deformation of American law, the illegal detention and the illegal torture, is an outrage of modern American government. From the standpoint of American security, the war in Iraq was not a necessary war. In some ways it made us more vulnerable. From the standpoint of the political development of the most oil-rich and jihad-rich region in the world, the war in Iraq is an admirable venture, which in some ways may make us less vulnerable. The best that can be said of George W. Bush is that he is a small man doing a big thing. And of the war, that good may still come of it. I told you, I have nothing useful to say. **LEON WIESELTIER**

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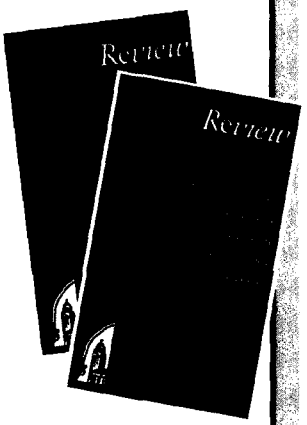

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—David Henderson

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—Nicholas Eberstadt

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1. Evidence shows that the presence of another wireline operator is critical to effective competition. The General Accounting Office found that DBS (satellite) competition causes only "a slight reduction" in cable prices while "competition from a second wire-based operator appears to significantly lower cable prices." GAO-04-8 Issues Related to Competition and Subscriber Rates in the Cable Television Industry, October 2003

2. In areas where wireline competition has been introduced, the incumbent cable provider cut prices between 28-42%. "Battle for the Bundle: Consumer Wireline Services Pricing," Bank of America Equity Research, January 23, 2006

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